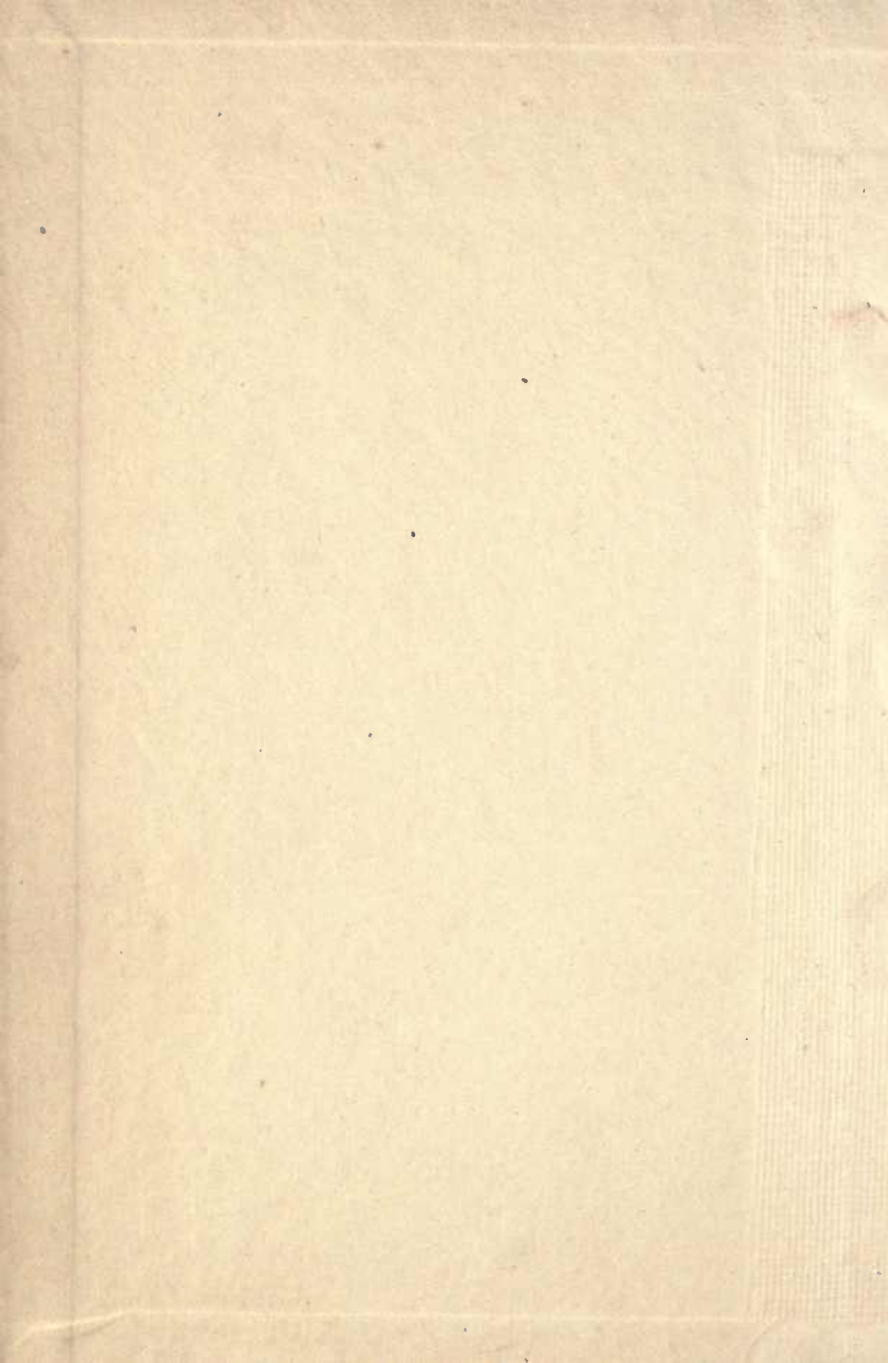


The DEATH
CRY

by Darby
Hauck



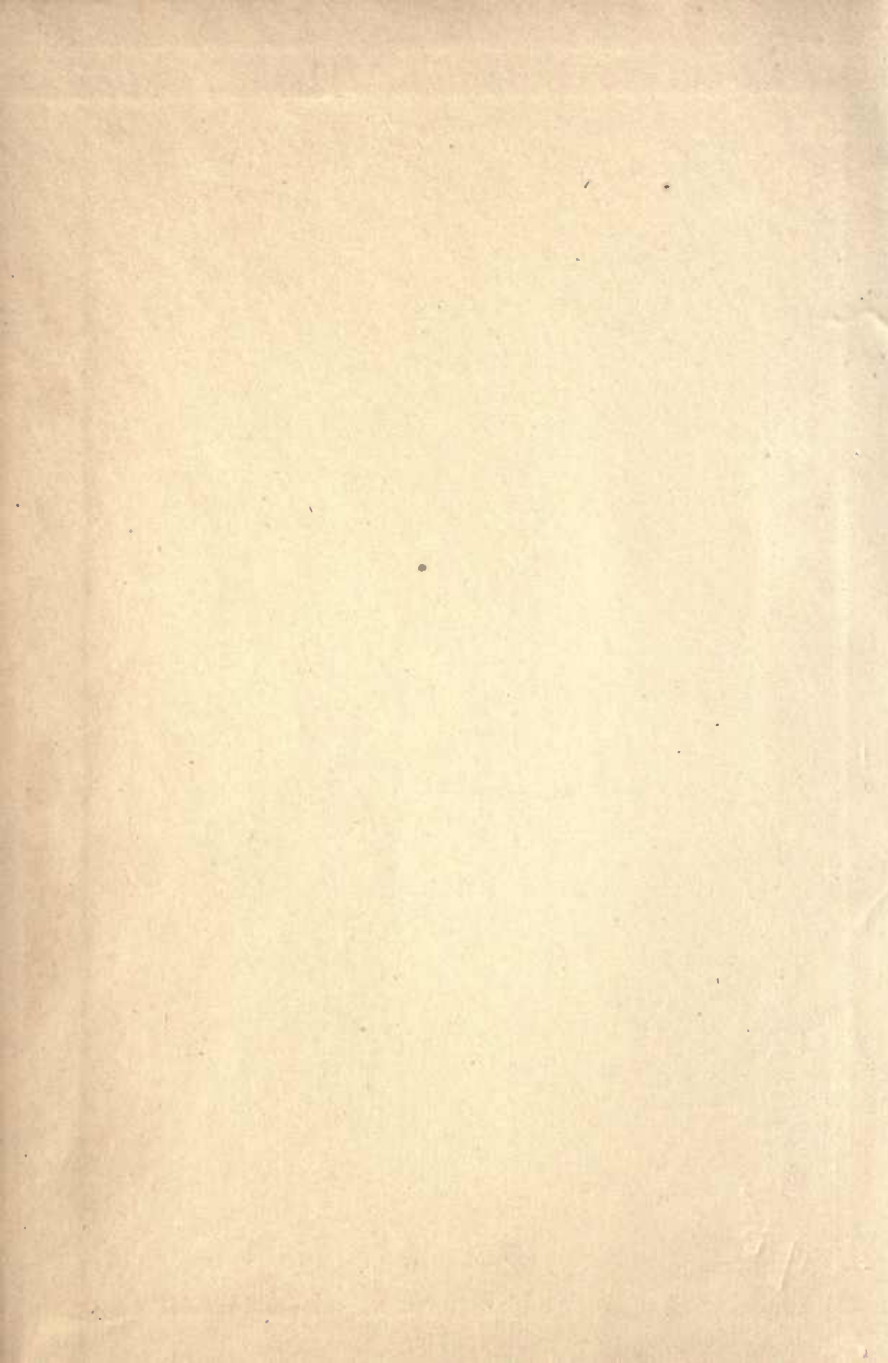
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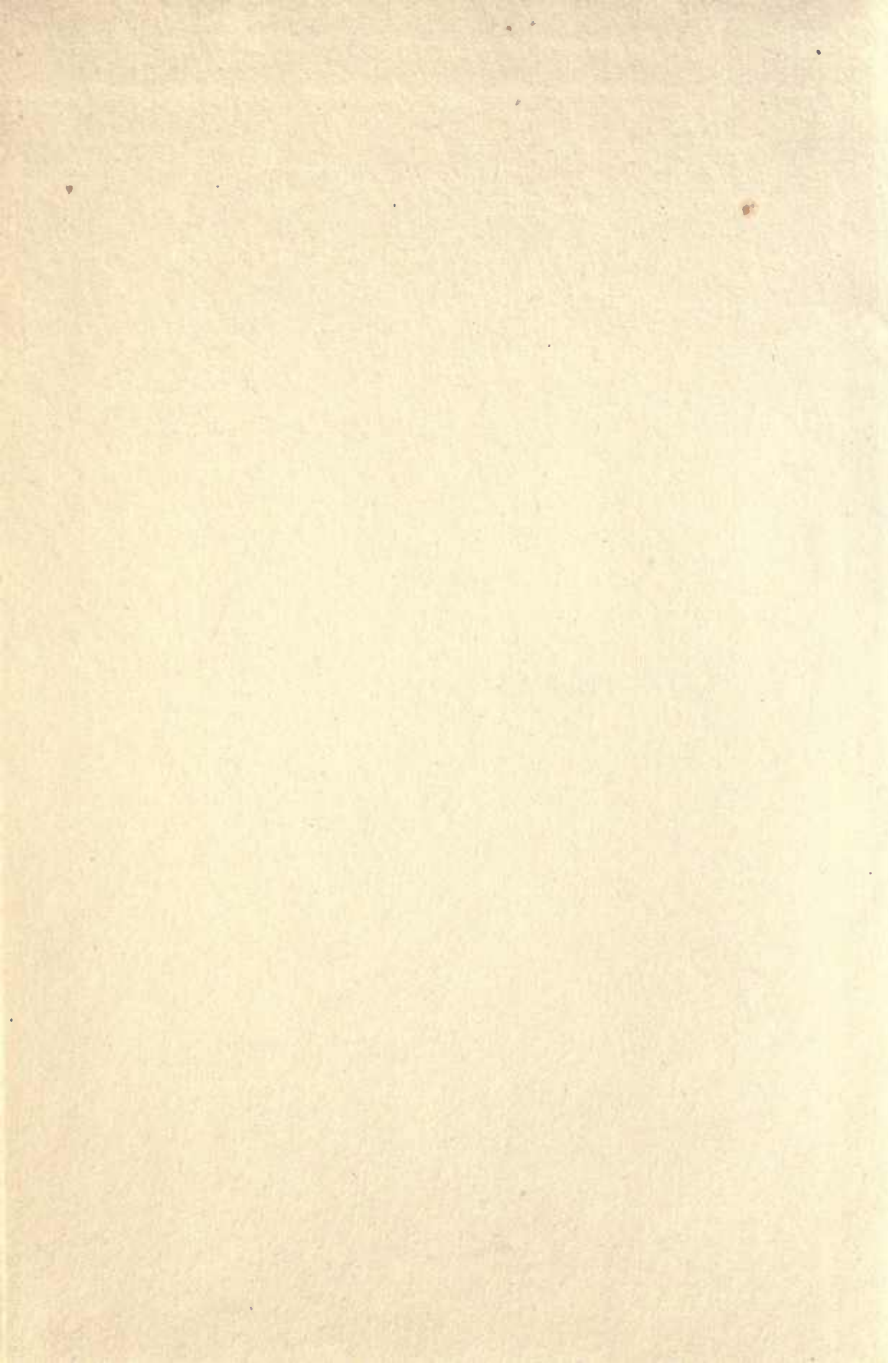
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THE DEATH CRY





“Central declared that no one had called.”

THE DEATH CRY

BY

DARBY HAUCK

**Frontispiece by
Eleanor Howard**



NEW YORK

**ROBERT J. SHORES
PUBLISHER**

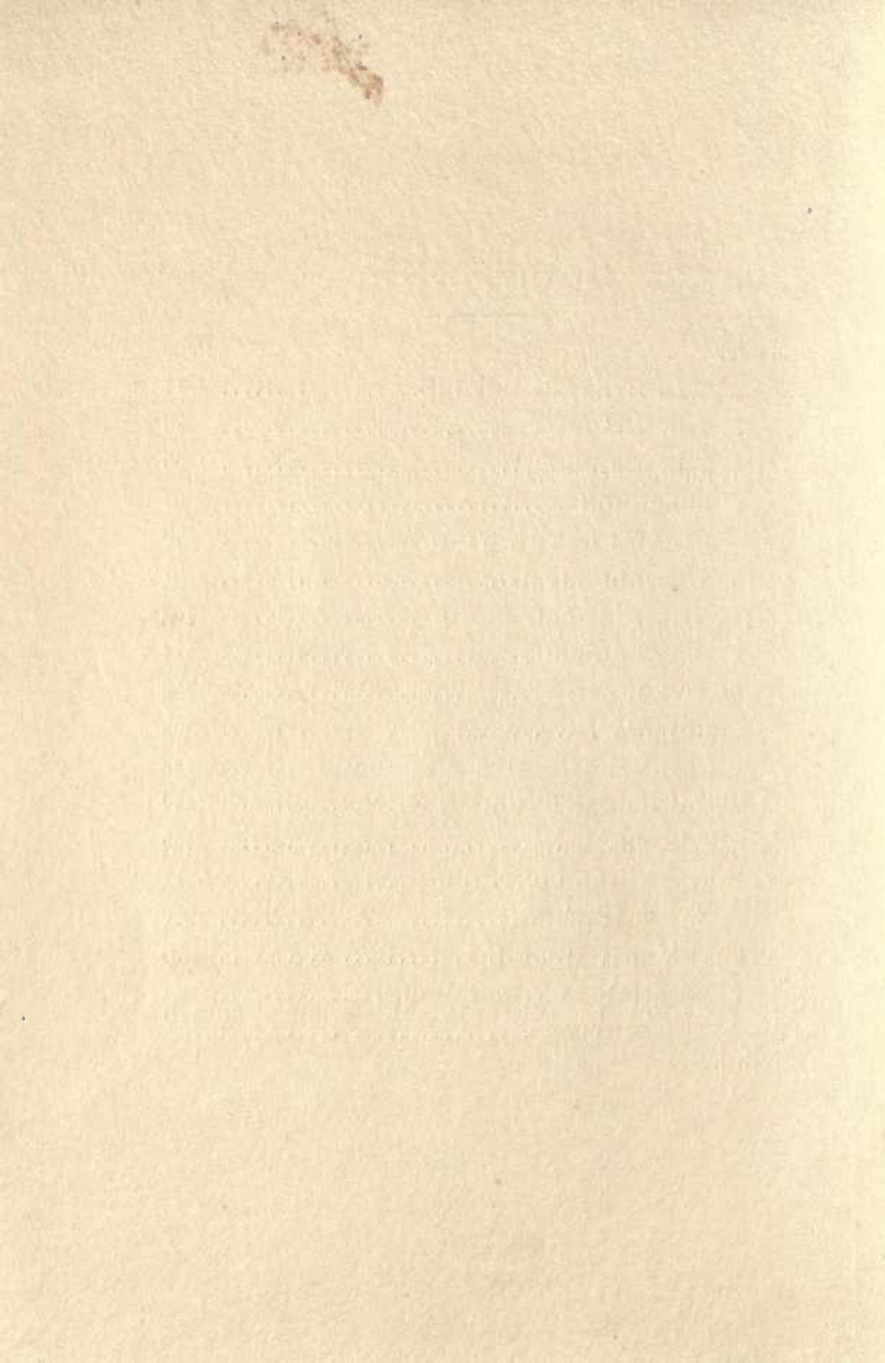
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THE DEATH CRY

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THE DEATH CRY

CHAPTER I

THE EVENING BEFORE

I remember perfectly the conversation I had with the Cuylers the evening of the tragedy, a wonderful June night of fragrance and starlight. An iris hedge separates our lawn from theirs, and, seeing Eloise cutting the blue flowers, I strolled over to chat with her, while N. P. finished the evening paper. I never saw a man so wedded to his paper. The hottest night he sits inside and drips, rather than miss a single paragraph.

Eloise was full of the party she was giving the next day to celebrate Mariechen's fourth birthday.

"The cake came this afternoon," she said happily. "It's a perfect beauty. It has little Kewpies in frosting perched all round the edge. I know Mariechen will go wild when she sees it. And Mrs. Smith finished her dress this afternoon; she looks like a darling angel in it."

"She is so pretty," I answered, sympathetically. "Wasn't she clever to combine her father's dark eyes with your golden hair?"

"I wish she'd taken more than her eyes from him." A little breath of a sigh escaped from Mrs. Cuyler. "She isn't a bit like him in disposition, and I have such a dread of her growing up as timid as I am. You'll have to take us both in hand, Courtney, and show me how to make her self-reliant like yourself."

I laughed shortly. The idea of lovely Eloise Cuy-

ler wishing her only child to be like me rather than like her own exquisite self was absurd.

"Her father probably wouldn't approve of such a procedure," I was saying, when Dr. Cuyler himself came out to join us, his cigarette glowing in the dusk.

"Of what wouldn't I approve?" he inquired. "Certainly not of engaging Kronig's orchestra to play to-morrow. I believe that's the only frill we've neglected for the kiddie's ball; but I tell Eloise we have to reserve something for the debut."

Though he sometimes affected disapproval of his wife's open adoration of their child, as far as I could see he was every bit as bad himself. And Mariechen—as she had gradually evolved from the Mary Katherine which combined the names

of both grandmothers—is certainly an adorable baby.

“Don’t pay any attention to him, Courtney,” Eloise retorted gayly. “He spoils her far more than I do. I wish you could see the toys he’s bought for her to-morrow—a beautiful collie pup besides. But you haven’t observed the lovely thing he’s given me.” She held out her arm, and I noticed for the first time a new ornament upon it, a wonderful bracelet of sapphires and diamonds set in the new white gold. “Isn’t it beautiful? I had to scold him a little for being so extravagant, but I really am mad about it.”

“To-morrow isn’t your birthday, too, by any chance?” I asked, admiring as I so often did, with a little bit of secret envy, the lovely curve of her arm as well as the sparkling jewels upon it.

"Oh, no! But you know every year since Mariechen was born Vincent has given me a present on the anniversary. Isn't it a dear thing for him to do?"

I glanced casually at Dr. Cuyler's clear profile as I assented. It *was* a dear thing for him to do, I thought, and exactly in keeping with his tender, intense nature. I had known Vincent Cuyler in his bachelor days and before he had "arrived", for his emergence into the brilliant fashionable physician began about the time of his marriage. Eloise I had known only since her marriage and then just in a casual way up until a year ago when the Cuylers bought the place next to us. But it was plain from the beginning that she was the one woman in the world for him and as I knew her more intimately I came to take a vicarious satisfaction in

their happiness. In spite of all the bosh about soul mates and affinities, one does occasionally see two shining personalities whom God hath joined together, even in a perverse old world like this.

But I am rambling away from my subject and on a fruitless trail for my own very positive opinion as to the felicity of the Cuyler's married life didn't amount to a row of pins at the time it was needed. So to return to facts.

Darkness had fallen upon us as we talked and just here I distinctly remember Dr. Cuyler's exclaiming:

"Eloise, are you getting chilly? I thought I felt you shiver." He touched the sheer organdy of her frock inquiringly. "Your sleeve feels damp. I'll go into the house and get you a wrap. That dress you have on is as flimsy as a surgical gauze."

"Oh, no," she detained him laughingly. "I'm not cold, dear, really I'm not. I don't know what made me shiver. Somebody must have stepped on my grave, I guess."

"Why don't you come up and sit on our porch?" I suggested. "N. P. won't be through with his paper for another hour and I'm pining for good society."

Dr. Cuyler was ready to accept my invitation, but Eloise hesitated over it.

"There are several things I still have to do for tomorrow—packages to tie up, you know. And I'm a little tired anyway; so I think I'd better go in." Then, gracious as always, she added to the Doctor. "You go and sit with Courtney awhile. I know you'll enjoy a visit with her."

It was her husband's turn to hesitate. "I did

want to talk with Mrs. Temple tonight. Several things have come up about the Detention Home. Perhaps I will go over for a half an hour. Sure you won't mind, Sweet?"

"No, indeed. I'd love to have you, really I would. Go right along." Her hand caressed his coat sleeve reassuringly. "Goodnight, Courtney. Don't forget to come over early tomorrow, please. I'm counting so much on your helping me, especially with the little boys."

Fair and sweet, she moved across the grass, a wraithlike figure with her lovely hair and bare white throat and arms gleaming through the dark. Unconsciously both her husband and I followed her with eyes of admiration. If I had known then—but the Doctor was speaking,

"A 'wonderful clear night of stars', isn't it?"

he quoted, with an upward glance at the flashing golden galaxy. "It's a sin to sit under a roof."

"Let's don't do it then," I jumped quickly with his mood.

The Cuyler's yard is a bit lower than ours and we have had a couple of steps built in the shallow terrace as a short cut between the two lawns. I sat down on the top step and invited him to join me.

"Sure it won't be too damp for you?" he asked courteously.

I shrugged my shoulders. "Hardly. I'm as tough as a pine knot, you know."

"That's what your athletics do for you." His hand touched my warm arm as he folded himself up on the lower step. "Superb circulation." It was the Doctor, not the man who spoke. "I was

going to offer you my coat but apparently you don't need it. I wish you could coax Eloise out to golf with you," he went on. "She doesn't get as much exercise as she should. Her garden is about the only interest she has that keeps her out in the open."

"Eloise isn't the type for athletics. You might as easily imagine the Blessed Damozel in sport clothes."

"Isn't that just like a woman?" he derided my remark. "I'm not thinking of her appearance, but of her health. Besides," he added with naiveté that was charming, "I think she's beautiful in anything she wears! However—" and he plunged into the problem in the Detention Home that was pressing on him at the moment.

Hand in hand with his fashionable practice Dr.

Cuyler kept up a vast amount of charitable work. Eloise always furthered him in this, mothering the strays, befriending the Magdalines and playing Lady Bountiful to all the poor old men and women her husband would let her know about. He had to draw the line somewhere, he used to say, for Eloise never would, and her heart and purse were continually being wrung by some poor creature in distress. The impish little rascals in the Detention Home were about the only ones her loving charity could not compass. Bad boys, she regretfully admitted, were beyond her ken. And this is where I came in strong. I've always had an immense amount of interest and sympathy for little gutter snipes and somehow those troublesome protégés of Dr. Cuyler's took to me and I to them.

I think it was a combination of the Blue Jay,

my fast blue roadster, "V. V.", the white bull terrier that always rides along, and the fact that I can pitch ball and pitch straight, that first inclined their calloused young hearts toward me. Anyhow, whenever they are particularly obstreperous and whenever there is a row on between them and the matron, or trouble with the trustees, Dr. Cuyler invariably calls on me to go and mix up in it. I'm explaining all this now in order that it may be understood later how unjust were the newspaper insinuations.

It was a particularly poignant situation that he laid before me that night but though we were both tremendously interested in the topic, neither of us lost sight of the time, and I *know* that we did not sit out there more than three quarters of an hour. Dr. Cuyler had Eloise on his mind for she

was alone in the house except for Mariechen; and in the light that streamed through the open French windows of our library I could see from the sheets of paper littered around him that N. P. was nearing the close of his evening stunt.

He was on the last page when I went into the house to join him, his big bulk stodged into a leather chair. He had all the lights blazing and the room was like a furnace, but though his face was terribly red and moist he looked up to greet me with his usual easy smile.

"Been having a chat with the Cuylers?" he inquired comfortably. There is nothing that gives N. P. quite such a satisfied feeling as to know that I am enjoying myself without his being directly responsible for my pleasure. "Why didn't they come in?"

"Oh, Eloise is getting ready for the party and she had some last things to do. Mercy, N. P., it's hot in here! I don't see how you stand it. Come out on the porch and cool off before you have a stroke of apoplexy."

"It is warm," he conceded mildly as though it hadn't occurred to him before. "I was absorbed in this Mexican business and I didn't seem to notice. Whew! I'm thirsty. Do you suppose that darky has left any beer on the ice?"

"That darky," America Parker, the black autocrat who has kept house for "Mr. Nat" since his bachelor days and who rules our household with a rod of iron, makes no distinction between meum and teum in the kitchen, so I never know how much of what I put there I may count on for my own.

.

But I must be very exact from now on as to the incidents that led up to the discovery of that awful night. We had found a couple of bottles on the ice and N. P. was just applying the corkscrew when we were startled by a woman's scream, a terrible piercing scream that rose and wavered and fell and rose again in a kind of shuddering moan.

"For the Lord's sake!"

N. P. is about as easy to excite as the Rock of Gibraltar, but that ghastly scream stirred even him. He laid the corkscrew down and stared at me.

"Something terrible has happened," I gasped and started to my feet. "That was Eloise' voice! Come on, N. P."

We hurried out of the house with one accord

and started toward the Cuylers'. They were illuminated upstairs and down but there was no sign of any disturbance over there. No second harrowing scream followed the first. Nothing broke the silence of our quiet neighborhood but the lively music of some frogs in the park across the street. Out in the peaceful night N. P. was inclined to doubt the evidence of our ears.

"Seems perfectly quiet over there," he paused to remark. "I guess there's nothing much the matter after all. Maybe Mrs. Cuyler had the nightmare."

We waited uncertainly for a few minutes but I could not feel satisfied to go in without knowing that everything was all right at the Cuylers'.

"Let's just go over and inquire, anyway," I suggested. "We don't have to go in, you know, and I don't believe they've gone to bed."

"Well, wait till I light my pipe," N. P. said resignedly. His interest in the scream had died away with his own explanation of it. He fiddled around with one match after another, but finally I got him started. As we crossed the lawn the doctor himself appeared upon his porch.

"Oh, what was the matter?" I cried to him. "Has anything happened to Eloise?"

Dr. Cuyler stepped down to speak to us, and in the glare of the porch light his face had a strained, almost an embarrassed look.

"You heard her scream?" he inquired. "I was afraid you would and that you'd think we'd caught a burglar, so I came out to reassure you. There's nothing wrong, only Eloise had a bad fright, and it's shaken her up a bit."

"What in the world?"

"Only a harmless snake; but you know, Mrs. Temple, how the sight of one always terrifies her. This one got into the house in some mysterious fashion and Eloise discovered it crawling out from under the davenport. When she looked down and saw it wriggling so near her foot she nearly had hysterics. She was pretty well tired out tonight, anyway," this last addressed apologetically to my husband.

"No wonder she screamed," I said with emphasis, for men are so superior about these things. "She has a perfect horror of snakes, I know. Did you kill it? Where do you suppose it came from?"

"Probably from that vacant lot next door. I've been trying all summer to get the owner to cut those weeds. Yes, I killed it and threw it back into the lot. That place is a regular nuisance. I'll

see old Timmons about it in the morning. It's lucky for us you're our only near neighbors, or we'd have had a swarm of excited females about our ears by now. Sorry we kicked up such a disturbance."

"*I'm* sorry Mrs. Cuyler's had such a shock to her nerves," my husband said in his kindest voice.

"Sure there's nothing we can do for her?"

"Nothing, thank you. I've given her a dose of veronal and she's lying on the couch. I'll put her to bed in a few minutes and she'll be all right after a night's rest. Awfully kind of you to come over though."

As I write this I'm taxing my mind to see if I had detected the slightest hint in his manner of anything wrong. For the life of me I can't remember anything. There was regret for his wife's

fright, perhaps a slight trace of annoyance at the commotion they had caused. But other than that—well, I never was renowned for my perceptivity, and blessed old N. P.'s mind is a logical rather than an intuitive one.

We said goodnight and returned to our interrupted crackers and beer. About an hour later, I should imagine it was, at any rate I was in bed and nearly asleep and N. P. was fussing with his studs in his clean shirt for the morning, we heard the doctor's car being run out of the garage, and then set off at a lively clip up the street.

"A call, I suppose," N. P. observed from his place at the chiffonier. "Glad I'm not a doctor. Pretty tough after a hard day's work to be routed out at this time of night to ease up some old

lady's asthma or to help a new voter into the world."

"It's hard on Eloise, too," I murmured sleepily. "She's not in very good condition to be left alone after the shock she had this evening. I wonder if I hadn't better call her up and see if she'd like me to stay with her until after the doctor gets back."

"Where are the maids?"

"Gone to a sister's wedding, or something."

"Both of them? I thought the reason Cuyler wasn't willing to have that married couple sleep in the garage was because he wanted Mrs. Cuyler always to have someone in the house with her for just such occasions."

"He did, but you know Eloise." We both laughed indulgently. "She'd sacrifice herself any

time to make somebody else happy. And this was a very special affair, I believe—fried chicken and a lace veil and a wedding cake.”

“Oh, well, I guess they’d call up if they wanted us. Mrs. Cuyler’s probably asleep, and the telephone might startle her.” N. P. dismissed the subject easily, and as I was half asleep I yielded to his viewpoint. Bitterly did I repent my decision later! Oh, for foresight instead of hindsight!

Some time in the night I was awakened by the shrill, persistent sound of the telephone. N. P. was sleeping heavily, and as if in obedience to some imperative demand I stumbled out of bed, instead of awakening him as I usually do when the phone rings at night, and ran to answer it myself. The sound of Mr. Cuyler’s voice, loud

and shaken with emotion, roused me with a vengeance.

"Mrs. Temple? Is your husband there?" he called. "This is Cuyler. Tell him to come over at once, for God's sake!" and hung up the receiver before I could answer a word.

I went back and shook N. P. into consciousness.

"Hurry! Hurry!" I implored him frantically. "There is something terribly wrong over at the Cuylers'. The doctor has just called up and asked for you to come over at once."

I was struggling into kimona and slippers as I spoke, and by the time N. P. was sufficiently clad I was ready too.

I clutched his arm, and with an ominous dread at our hearts we raced across the lawn. The front

door was unlocked, and there was a light burning in the hall, but no one was downstairs. From above I could hear a curious gasping sound. It ceased, and everything was silent. N. P. halted at the foot of the stairs and looked up frowningly.

"Courtney, you better wait here. I'll go up first and see."

I usually do as N. P. says when he speaks like that; but Eloise's hysterical scream over the snake had stirred me up a bit, and some unreasonable dread for her clutched at my heart, so I could not lag behind.

We went up the steps abreast, and just as we reached the top that strangling moan came again. It seemed to issue from the front bedroom, which belonged to Eloise, and we turned in that direc-

tion. Just outside the door N. P. tripped on a hanging shoelace, so it was I who turned the knob and looked in upon that tragedy.

CHAPTER II

THE TRAGEDY

In thinking it out afterwards, it seemed to me that I could have stood the horror better if it had not happened in Eloise's own blue boudoir; that it would have been a degree less frightful in any other room in the house. But to stumble upon a sight so revolting in that dainty place of ivory woodwork and furniture, of soft blue draperies and rugs, where even the filmy negligé across the *chaise longue* breathed of its beautiful owner—Ugh! my brain curdles at the recollection.

In the intimacy of that feminine atmosphere Dr. Cuyler's big frame loomed dark and virile. He

was leaning against the wall, his hands clenched at his sides, his eyes riveted to the bed. Even as I entered, there burst from his lips that strange choking groan I had heard before. I followed the direction of his wild gaze—O Eloise, Eloise! Even yet I can scarcely believe it was you, dear, that I saw!

She lay across the edge of the bed, her feet resting upon the floor. She was in her nightgown, and the lacy garment was torn and stained with blood. I fought down a wild desire to shriek. There were bruises on her delicate throat and shoulder; the bright veil of her hair was clotted with blood—the whole left side of her head had been crushed in.

* * * * *

I don't know how I long I stood there staring,

watching the slow drip, drip of the red stream that flowed sluggishly down the white counterpane.

It was N. P.'s hand on my arm that roused me at last.

"Don't, Courtney. Don't look at her! Doctor, for God's sake! Why don't you do something?"

He took a step toward the bed, as though to lift the inert figure lying there. The doctor was upon him with one spring.

"Don't touch her!" he commanded. "There's nothing you can do or I can do. She's dead—quite dead. Don't you suppose I made sure of that before I called you? She'd dead, dead—" his voice broke.

It was obvious that life had indeed left that beautiful body. N. P. suddenly revised his first inclination. Still keeping his hold on me, he linked

his other arm in Dr. Cuyler's and led us both toward the door.

"I'll call for help," he said. "Better wait outside while I do it."

My gaze clung to the room. It was not much disordered, but a chair was overturned, and I noticed a clump of iris lying in some water on the floor. Radiant with life, Eloise had held some of those same heavenly blue flowers in her hands as I talked with her a few hours ago, and now—!

"Wait a minute, N. P.," I urged him at the door. "I can't go and leave her like this. Surely there must be something I can do for her."

N. P. shoved me gently into the hall and closed the door behind us.

"I'm going to call Dr. Penrose and the police. Stay here while I do it."

I waited in the silent, dimly lit hall, my heart pounding furiously against my ribs. I heard my husband call the different numbers in quick succession. Presently he tiptoed downstairs to admit someone. There was the sound of low voices and the clanging of the ambulance away down the street.

As the men began to ascend the stairs I beat a hasty retreat into Mariechen's pink and white nest across the hall. Oddly enough, this was the first time the thought of her had occurred to any of us. She was fast asleep and did not waken when I bent over her. She was sprawled across her little bed in the blessed, abandoned sleep of childhood, oblivious to all that had transpired. A battered elephant reposed close to her curly head; one dimpled hand clutched a weather-beaten Teddy bear.

She had kicked the sheet entirely off, and the cool night air was blowing straight across her. I stooped to tuck her in, and as I recalled how often I had seen her tender mother bending over the same task, the iron band around my heart relaxed, and to my own great surprise, I burst into wild sobs.

Mariechen awoke at once with a frightened baby wail, and I reproached myself for my lack of self-control. By the time I had hushed her to sleep again, the house was astir with many people coming and going hurriedly, but with lowered, shocked voices. N. P. came in soon after that, and advised me to go home and take Mariechen with me.

"There is nothing you can do here. She is beyond help, as Dr. Cuyler said, and nothing can

be touched until the coroner comes. I'll carry the child over for you, and then I'll stay with the doctor till morning."

"What have you found out?" I asked anxiously.

"Absolutely nothing," N. P. replied, with a stern, sober face. "It is all wrapped in mystery. Cuyler came home from his call and found—what you saw. He's almost in a collapse, and I haven't talked with him much. Dr. Penrose has him in charge at present. Hurry, Courtney. I want to take you away from here."

I wrapped Mariechen in a blanket and put her in N. P.'s arms. We made our way down the back stairs and out at the side door. She did not waken again until I had her settled in my own bed, and then only to call for "Muvver" in a sleepy voice.

"Yes, precious. You're all right now with Auntie Court. Shut your eyes and go to sleep."

N. P. had carried her upstairs for me, but he was in a hurry to be back at the Cuylers'. I caught him by the tail of his coat just as he was tiptoeing out of the room.

"Wait a minute," I whispered. "Oh, N. P., I can't bear to have you back over there."

It was a curious thing that while I was at the Cuylers' no fear had touched me—only a dumb horror of that which had happened to my friend. But now I shuddered at the thought of my husband going back to that tragic house.

"Nonsense, Courtney," he began, but at the sight of my face in the lighted hall he instantly changed his tone.

"Why, child, you needn't be the least afraid.

There's no danger over there now. The brute, whoever it was, is as far away by this time as his heels will carry him."

He patted my shoulder consolingly, and I was half ashamed of my anxiety. But if I had known then what I was to know later, no amount of argument would have lulled my fears to rest.

"If you feel nervous you'd better have America down here with you until I get back."

He went into the back hall and called up lustily to the third floor. America usually sleeps like a log. I don't think the trump of Gabriel would awaken her, but "Mr. Nat's" stentorian "Hi there, America!" always does. He waited until he heard her creaking down the stairs, then he kissed me and departed, leaving me to horrible recollections for the rest of the night.

CHAPTER III

THE INQUEST

The sun was already up, and birds were singing ecstatically when my husband came back home. In the radiant morning light his face looked drawn and grey, and his grim expression made the sunshine seem a travesty. I'd been watching for him to come across the lawn and I was down at the door to meet him.

"Have you come home to stay?" I asked. "And wouldn't you like some breakfast?"

He assented wearily. Without asking any further questions I led him into the dining room. One thing I've learned in the nine years of my

married life—and I know my lesson perfectly—I never bother N. P. with questions when he is hungry or tired or worried.

By the time he had had fruit and cereal and a second cup of coffee his pleasant mouth had relaxed into its natural lines, and he began to look a little more like himself.

“Feeling better?” I inquired.

“George! I feel as if I’d waked up from a nightmare,” he answered. “To come to all this,” he motioned around the sunny dining room, “and to see you at the table just the same—” his face clouded again. “Poor Cuyler! It might have been my wife instead of his.”

“How is he?” I plunged eagerly into the opening he gave me.

“Like a man in a trance. You never saw any-

thing so pitiable. It's natural, of course. But it makes him seem—unnatural, somehow." N. P. struggled inarticulately to convey his meaning, but abandoned it as a bad job.

"The funeral arrangements can't be made until we hear from Mrs. Cuyler's mother. I've sent her a succession of telegrams, breaking the news, and we ought to have an answer soon," he went on more coherently, finding himself on firmer ground. "The police have the rest in charge. Cuyler's going to offer a reward for the apprehension of the murderer. We haven't decided on the amount yet. I told him I'd think it over and let him know later. Poor old chap; he seems to rely on me for everything."

Dozens of questions came tripping to my lips,

and we fell into a prolonged discussion of the affair.

"There'll be an inquest, you know," N. P. informed me, "this afternoon at three o'clock; and you and I will both have to testify."

It had an appalling sound to me. I dreaded it at the time, but as I look back at it now, after all I've been through, a coroner's inquest seems a comparatively simple matter.

I can't stop to speak of those ghastly hours I put in at the Cuylers' that morning. Somebody had to take the house in charge, and it was N. P.'s own suggestion that I go over and do what I could. There were older women, of course, and just as intimate friends of the Cuylers, who would have been glad to show their sympathy in that way, but I was right there next door. It seemed so obvi-

ously "up to me" that it is hard to realize even yet that gossip could have made capital out of my friendly ministrations.

The colored servants were in a panic and had to be set to work. There were innumerable inquiries at the door and at the telephone to be answered. I only saw the doctor for a few minutes when I carried a tray of breakfast to him. He kept himself immured upstairs, but I coaxed him out on the upper verandah long enough to drink a cup of coffee.

A telegram came from his mother-in-law, Mrs. Wilding, while I was out there, and he turned it over to me, asking that N. P. make the funeral arrangements for the following afternoon. I felt dismissed, and yet I couldn't bear to leave him there alone. I made some tentative suggestions

as to his seeing Mariechen, but he demurred very positively.

"I cannot be away from here, and I do not want her brought back to the house. If you will keep her with you for the present it will be a great kindness."

Of course I assured him of my willingness to do so. We talked of the child a moment, and I was just about to go when Dr. Cuyler surprised me with a question.

"Will you come and see her a moment?" I knew that he referred to Eloise. Remembering the night before, I could barely repress a shudder at the thought of entering that room again. Afterwards I was glad that I had gone.

The coroner's visit concluded, skilled hands had taken the place in charge, and there was nothing

in the blue boudoir now to shock the sense. The shades were only partly drawn, and the pleasant subdued light filtered through the open windows. Someone had replaced the iris in a slender vase. Their sweet, insistent fragrance permeated the air. The room looked just as I had seen it many times except for the white, still figure on the couch. They had swathed the upper part of her head with tulle, I observed with gratitude, and her face was as beautiful and natural as if she were just asleep. She looked like some serene, lovely statue, and I wondered, as I looked at her with a great lump swelling in my throat, how anyone could have wished to harm her, so fair, so gentle, so sweet. Dr. Cuyler stood beside me in silence. Only when I stooped down to kiss the soft curve of her throat I heard the swift intake of his breath.

"Thank you, Mrs. Temple," he said in a low voice, as I turned with tear-blinded eyes to leave the room. "You have made her seem almost herself to me again."

I parted with him at the door and did not see him again until the inquest was held that afternoon. It was not to be until three o'clock, so I had time to go back home and arrange my household affairs. N. P. came to luncheon, and later he escorted me again to the house on the other side of the hedge.

The inquest was to be held in the library, and the coroner and his jury and several of the neighbors were already there when we arrived. The florist's wagon had just driven away, and the house was perfumed with heliotrope and roses. A fresh sheaf of Eloise's iris had been brought in

from the garden and lay in a cerulean heap on the hall table. The doctor was not down, but when everyone else had arrived, the coroner sent a message upstairs requesting Dr. Cuyler's presence. He came in, looking neither to the right nor to the left, and took the chair next to my husband. N. P. held out a sympathetic hand, but the doctor did not see it. N. P. thrust it into his pocket and looked about him with what he believed to be an air of unconcern.

The coroner, a man named Beeman, rose and gave a nervous explanation of the purpose and method of conducting an inquest. He was twisting his watch-chain agitatedly as he talked, and he spoke in so low a voice that I heard him with difficulty across the room. But as he began the

examination of witnesses he regained his composure, and things moved forward briskly.

Dr. Cuyler was the first witness called. His pallor was startling, and his eyes looked like burnt out coals. In a lifeless voice he related all he knew of the night's tragedy.

"I was called to see a patient about twelve o'clock. I left my wife sleeping under the effects of a dose of veronal which I had given her an hour before. She had had a bit of a fright and was nervous. I was gone an hour, perhaps longer. I did not notice the time when I left my patient, but it was one o'clock when I stopped in a drug store to leave a prescription on my way home. I was in the drug store about fifteen minutes, and it may have been half-past-one when I arrived home. I put my machine in the garage and let

myself in with my night key at the front door. The light in the hall—a two-candle power bulb we use when I am out—was burning as I had left it.

“The house was perfectly silent as I entered, although as I passed up the stairs I fancied I heard the squeak of the swinging door between the dining-room and the butler’s pantry. I listened a moment, but decided that it was the draft from the open windows which made the door move slightly. I went on to my wife’s room and noticed that her door was closed. I wondered at this a little, for it always stands open at night. I did not stop to speculate concerning it, but turned the knob and entered the room. You know what I saw.” A tremor passed over his face, but he went on in the same monotonous tone.

“I stood looking at my wife for a second—a

minute—I don't know just how long I did stand there. Finally I approached the bed and laid my hand on her heart, though I had known the minute I saw her that life was extinct. She had been dead about fifteen minutes, I should say. As soon as I was quite convinced of that fact, I telephoned our next-door neighbor. Mrs. Temple answered the phone, I think, and they both came over at once. I believe I've told you all I know that has any bearing on the case. Whatever questions you wish to ask I will answer if I can."

There was a full minute's silence when the toneless voice ceased and the doctor sat down. The horror of that awful discovery lay dark upon us all. The coroner cleared his throat apologetically and began:

"It seems necessary to ask you some questions,

Doctor, but I will be as brief as I can. What was the cause of your wife's fright earlier in the evening?"

Dr. Cuyler explained the episode of the snake. I thought the faces of the jury were tinged with a slight incredulity as they listened. To their masculine minds it verged upon the ridiculous that any woman should be so overcome at the sight of a harmless garter snake she required a sleeping draught to quiet her.

"What did you do with the snake after you'd killed it?"

The passion for detail which is ever present in a narrow mind prompted the juror's question.

"I threw it into the weeds in the vacant lot." The juror nodded, satisfied.

"Have you missed anything of value since the

murder? Can you assign robbery as the motive?"

It was the coroner who spoke.

"A sapphire bracelet I had given her the evening before—last evening, is gone. Nothing downstairs seems to have been touched."

"Have you examined her personal effects? Have you looked through her dresser drawers?"

"Yes. There is nothing else missing."

"Hm! But of course the robber, if there was a robber, may have been frightened away before he finished his search. Was the bracelet a valuable one?"

"Yes, it was rather valuable. I forgot to tell you that there is also a vase missing from the room."

"Indeed. Will you describe it?"

"I will try, although I have never examined it

very closely," the doctor said. "It was one of our wedding gifts, and my wife kept it always filled with flowers. It was of bronze, with a jug-like base and a slender stem. It stood about twelve inches high, I imagine."

"Did it possess a financial value?"

"As to that I cannot say. I'm no judge of curios. To me it was a vase and nothing more. It may have been of interest to a connoisseur."

The coroner dismissed the vase with a wave of his hand.

"Now, Doctor, about that call," he went on impressively. "Where did you go at that time?"

"I went to see Peter Rossbaum, at Fourth and Grant streets. He had a touch of ptomaine poisoning," the doctor explained in an uninterested tone. The coroner made a note of the name and address.

"Eliminating the idea of robbery, there remains the motive of revenge. Have you any knowledge of any enemy or enemies which Mrs. Cuyler possessed?"

"None whatever. I do not believe there is a human being who had cause to dislike my wife. She was the gentlest, sweetest—" his voice failed, and he did not try to go on.

"And you, yourself. Is there anyone you know of who might wish to injure you or yours?"

I was watching the doctor, and I imagined I saw him start at this question, though he replied evenly enough:

"No one. So far as I know, I have no enemies."

"You are excused, Doctor. Will Mrs. Temple please come forward?"

It was my first experience of this kind and needless to say a trying one, but I told my story in the clearest manner I could. I told of the conversation the three of us had had that evening at the hedge; I related how we had heard Mrs. Cuyler scream and her husband's explanation of her fright. I told of hearing the motor car leave later on; and I told how I'd answered the telephone in the night. I described in as few words as possible the condition of affairs in that upper room at the time we entered it; even so I turned a little sick at the recollection of it all.

The jury was deeply interested and asked innumerable questions when I finished. The constraint which Dr. Cuyler's manner had laid upon them seem to lift with my recital.

Had I known Mrs. Cuyler long? How long?

About six years.

Had I known her husband before his marriage?

Yes, several years in a professional way.

Had I seen any suspicious characters prowling about the place?

No, I had not.

Et cetera, et cetera. I answered all their questions, satisfactorily I think, and was at last excused.

N. P. was next called and I did feel sorry for the poor old boy. He was so fearfully certain that he was going to say the wrong thing, so painfully intent upon saying the right, that any jury might have been excused from concluding he himself was the guilty party. When he sat down, he was panting and perspiring as though he had been engaged in chopping wood.

A few of the neighbors were then examined as to whether they had noticed anything unusual either before or after the murder, whether they had heard the scream earlier in the evening and if they had any knowledge of any enemies of the Cuylers. The situation of the doctor's house made their testimony of little value. Ours is the corner lot, the Cuylers' is next to it and then comes the vacant lot. The only other house in the block belongs to the Allens and as they were at the seashore the house was closed for the summer. Across the street is a pleasant little park.

The last person to testify was the physician who had examined the body on his arrival at the house. He described the nature of the wound and gave it as his opinion that it had been inflicted by some blunt weapon, probably the head of an ax or

hatchet. A thorough search of the premises had yielded no weapon of any sort. It was clear that Eloise' assailant had taken with him the fearful tool of his crime. When Dr. Penrose was asked as to the length of time Mrs. Cuyler had been dead when he came, he replied that in his opinion life had been extinct for half an hour or thereabout. This of course coincided with her husband's theory as it was all of a quarter of an hour after our arrival at the Cuyler's home before Dr. Penrose appeared.

This concluded the testimony. The jury withdrew to consider their verdict and we waited in the library to hear it. N. P. told me afterwards that the whole inquest had been conducted in a strangely informal manner, but I didn't know it. The coroner, it seems, was new to the business, as

he was acting in the absence of Dr. Lynch, the official coroner. I don't see myself what more could have been done at the time, but I know that later the Prosecuting Attorney was bitter in his denunciation of the proceedings.

The verdict was that Eloise Cuyler had come to her death on the morning of June fourth, presumably between the hour of one o'clock and one thirty, at the hands of a person or persons unknown, said death having been caused by a blow or blows from some blunt instrument, probably the head of an ax.

It was what we all expected of course. There seemed absolutely no clew to the murderer.

As we left the Cuyler's, it was an unpleasant surprise to find a crowd thronging the sidewalk and eyeing the house with morbid curiosity. By

night the whole town was ringing with the story, and the intense public interest spurred police and detectives alike to unusual action but with no immediate results.

CHAPTER IV

SUSPICION

The next two days were a waking nightmare of publicity and strenuosity for me. I thought I should probably take a back seat when Mrs. Wilding came, but I had never met her before or I should have known better. She was a frail, gentle little lady, in mourning for her husband, and too crushed by this second loss to have any initiative left. I did all I could for her and the doctor and for my Eloise—keeping her precious baby with me until not an outward sign of the tragedy was left in the Cuyler home.

Mrs. Wilding decided to stay on a few weeks

with her son-in-law and the night after the funeral she took Mariechen home. Gradually Dr. Cuyler came out of his frozen apathy and took up his duties as usual, but he was a wreck of his former self—any one could see that.

I am getting ahead of my story. The day after the funeral (that is, Thursday) N. P. came home greatly disturbed in his mind. While he was eating lunch he told me there were rumors abroad that the police were not satisfied with the verdict of the coroner's jury and were working on a theory of their own. No one came out in the open and put a name to the suspicions afloat, but it was known that the Prosecuting Attorney had found flaws in the doctor's story of the murder.

For instance, that snake incident,—I had noticed a number of men at work in the lot next the

Cuylers', cutting the weeds, and I wondered at the doctor's remembering at this time his threat to have those weeds removed. But it appeared that the men were employed by the police and their object was not to get rid of the weeds but to find the snake that the doctor said he had thrown there. And it couldn't be found. Of course that threw a terrible light on the affair. If there had been no snake, what had caused Mrs. Cuyler to scream?

"But there was a snake, of course!" I cried. "What if they didn't find it? I suppose a cat could have carried it off."

"Another strange thing." N. P. went on as if I hadn't spoken, "is that Peter Rossbaum whom the doctor says he called on that night has left the city, he and his wife both, and no one knows

where they are. So it can't be proved that Dr. Cuyler did call upon Rossbaum."

"But we ourselves heard his car leave the garage."

"We heard *a* car leave, dear. Neither of us could swear that it was his. And even so we don't know where he went, if he did leave the place."

I sat and stared a moment. Gradually the meaning of his remarks began to permeate my brain.

"N. P.!" I exclaimed indignantly. "Are you trying to tell me that any one has dared to intimate to you that Dr. Cuyler is implicated in all this? That he—that he—Oh, I never heard of anything so horrible!"

"It happens every day. Some brute of a man is always killing his wife," N. P. replied in a matter of fact way.

I rose from my chair in a kind of blind rage.

"Don't talk like that!" I stormed. "It sounds as if you thought—" I broke off abruptly. "Nathanial Penfield Temple, do you mean to tell me that you believe *for one little instant* that Dr. Cuyler is responsible for the death of Eloise?"

"Certainly I don't believe it." My husband flashed a stern but reassuring glance at me. "Sit down, Courtney, and don't get so excited. I'm only trying to show you how a case may be worked up against the doctor."

A sudden thought struck me.

"Pshaw! I can knock your old case in the head at the start. Eloise screamed somewhere about eleven o'clock. We *can* swear to that. And Dr. Penrose said she had not been dead more than

half an hour when he came and that was nearly two."

I looked triumphantly at N. P. N. P. looked at the carpet.

"She might not have been *killed* then, Courtney, but she might have been struck and died three hours later."

I gasped as though he'd thrown cold water in my face.

"And do you expect me—or anyone with a spark of the milk of human kindness in his breast—yes, I know perfectly that's a mixed metaphor, but I'm beyond syntax now—you expect me to believe that Vincent Cuyler, the tender, adoring husband that we know him to be—sat for three hours by the side of his wife, waiting for her to die from a blow that he himself had inflicted? Oh, N. P.,

whoever started *that* tale has overreached himself. It is so absurd I could laugh, if it were not for the horror of the thing."

N. P. sighed. "I'm only telling you what people are saying," he said again. "They don't know him as well as we do, remember."

I sat for a few minutes absolutely stunned by this revelation. It was almost as awful as losing Eloise to have her husband even remotely suspected of being her murderer.

"Does he know of these rumors?" I queried after a while.

"No, I don't believe he does. He wouldn't be apt to, you know, until the police decide to act."

"Ought you to tell him?"

"Why? It would only worry him and perhaps cause him to alter his usual habits in a manner

to confirm suspicion. If he is innocent—and of course he is—he has nothing to fear.”

“Oh, yes,” I replied with sarcasm. “We all know that only the guilty are brought to justice and the innocent are invariably cleared.”

N. P. sighed again and folded his napkin. The conversation haunted me all afternoon while I was over with Mrs. Wilding but when I returned for dinner I found the house in a commotion that drove the Cuylers’ affairs temporarily out of my mind.

N. P. was throwing things like a madman into a suitcase and America was waddling in and out with clean handkerchiefs, fresh underwear and the dear knows what all.

“Hello!” my husband greeted me, lifting a red face from the shoes he was attempting to cram

into a corner already occupied by a box of collars. "I was just coming after you. Got to leave here in twenty minutes to catch the Sunset Limited. I'm going to San Francisco on business for the firm. Telegram came this afternoon for one of us to come, and Weddle's down with tonsillitis, so it's up to me. I hate like thunder to leave you now, but it can't be helped. You can get some one to stay with you, can't you, and America will look after you all right. She's not afraid of the devil himself."

There was a sniff from that black potentate as she reappeared in the doorway bearing a pair of silk pajamas over her arm.

"Huccome yo' forgit dese yere Benjamens, Mistah Nat?" she inquired scornfully.

N. P. used to wear nightshirts in his archaic

bachelor days, and America has never forgiven me for persuading him to be up-to-date in his night attire. She laid the despised garments carefully in his suitcase and took the key out of his unresisting fingers.

"Hit's plum full now," she said, "an' dat air taxicab eatin' its haid off out in front. Put on yo' hat an' tell Miss Co'tney goodby. De good Lawd knows why yo' ain't takin' her along stid o' leavin' her hyah alongside o' murderers and thieves!"

N. P. was too busy with the first part of her remarks to give much heed to the latter but I rather echoed her sentiments. I'm pretty well accustomed to N. P.'s frequent absences on business and I'm apt to be quite philosophic about them, but somehow this time was different. I had barely re-

gained my poise after living in the shadow of the Cuyler tragedy the last four days, and already in anticipation I missed the comfortable bulwark of N. P.'s presence. He walked to the front door with his arm around me, cheerfully unconscious of my mood.

"Have a good time while I'm gone," he said. "Don't get morbid about the Cuylers and don't mix up in that matter I spoke to you about. Cuyler can take care of his own troubles, or if he can't, you can't help him any. Goodby, little girl."

The screen banged and he was gone. I had good reason in the days that followed to wish that I had taken his advice.

CHAPTER V

STRAWS IN THE WIND

The day after N. P.'s departure I went as usual to see if there was anything I could do for Mrs. Wilding. She reminded me of Eloise in an older, faded way and already I had become fond of her for her own as well as for her daughter's sake. I had made up my mind before I went to her that morning that I would protect her if it were a possible thing from any knowledge of the ugly rumors about her son-in-law. But I feared at first I was too late. I found her in a state of frightened bewilderment over a letter which had been handed in at the door by an unknown messenger. It was

written on a half sheet of notepaper and inclosed in a soiled envelope addressed to

"Mrs. Cuyler's Mother."

There were only two lines in a hand which, I thought, showed evidence of some education.

"DOCTOR CUYLER KNOWS WHO KILLED HIS WIFE. ASK HIM ABOUT THE OTHER WOMAN."

"Do you think—what do you suppose it means?" quavered the little lady while I stared in silence at the evil bit of paper. I thought hard.

"It's probably the work of some sensation loving gossip," I told her. "You know there are always such people who rise to the surface whenever a crime is committed, eager to get themselves before the gaze of the public. I wouldn't give it another thought if I were you."

Mrs. Wilding was plainly relieved at this opinion. Dear lady, it never took much argument to convince her.

"I wonder if I ought to show it to Vincent?" she puzzled.

"Oh, I wouldn't. He has enough to bear without troubling him with such vile insinuations. I believe I'd just destroy it—or no—give it to me and I'll keep it until Mr. Temple comes home. If he considers it of any importance he'll know what is best to do about it."

I took the letter home and locked it carefully in the desk in my bedroom where I hide whatever money I'm keeping in the house. I never used to think of being afraid of burglars, but I've grown cautious since the murder. I remember distinctly that I locked the desk for I was just putting the

key in my handbag when America appeared in the doorway.

"Looky hyah, Miss Co'tney," she began indignantly and she shook out a dusty, tumbled motor robe, a handsome new one that N. P. had given me for the Bluejay.

"Why, what's happened to it?" I exclaimed.

"Whut ain't happened to it, I say," America retorted. "I saw it layin' in de dust when I wuz hangin' out ma dishtowels—reckon yo'all dropped it ouden dat air rideabout, an' ef I ain't seen it and picked it up dish yere good-for-nothin' pup would a' chawed it to a frazzle. I lay I'd bust his haid open ef he had."

She took a step into the room and from behind her voluminous skirts V. V. cocked an impudent eye at me, secure in the knowledge that America's

bark, like his own, was considerably worse than her bite.

“ ’Taint no use for Mistah Nat to go spendin’ his money for folks to fling out in de road,” she muttered, reaching for my whistbroom.

“Don’t brush that dirty thing in here,” I stopped her. “Take it out on the porch to clean it and then put it back in the garage where it belongs. I don’t know how it got out of there anyway. I’ve not been out in the car for two days.”

America looked at me doubtfully. There was no one apparently on whom to lay the blame. Timothy, our chauffeur, was in the hospital for repairs, having taken a disastrous joy ride in the big car a couple of weeks ago. The car also was laid up for repairs so that at the time the garage was unoccupied except for the blue “rideabout”, as

America calls it, which no one ever drives but me. If I had stopped to puzzle it out then perhaps I could have prevented what was to occur; but my mind was occupied with that odious letter and I didn't give the robe another thought. Mentally I kept turning and twisting the doctor's affairs and try as I might I could not dismiss him from my thoughts.

Strangely enough that afternoon I had a visit from the Prosecuting Attorney. When America brought me his card I had half a mind to refuse to see him, knowing how displeased N. P. would be. But I didn't know whether one dared take such high-handed measures with a representative of the law, so I thought I had better go down. I found two men, instead of one, awaiting me.

Mr. Lipman had with him what I suppose you

would call a plain clothes detective, although his clothes were anything but plain—the loudest mustard checks and the most brilliant thing in the way of a tie that I have ever seen. He appeared to slumber quietly through the entire interview. At least he sat with his eyes half closed and his hands resting peacefully upon his knees. There was nothing sleepy about the Prosecuting Attorney. I know that man asked me two hundred questions. He began by wanting me to tell him the story of the murder as it was known to me. His confidential tone implied that I might tell *him* the facts as they really were. His manner annoyed me from the start, and I gave him the very briefest and barest version of it all that I could. But that didn't discourage that Lippman person, not a bit of it. He seized upon the fact that

neither N. P. nor I had had a glimpse of Eloise after she screamed, and he marvelled that we had not had foresight enough to insist upon entering the Cuylers' house then.

"I did not see any necessity for it," I said curtly. "Mrs. Cuyler was resting quietly, and there was no occasion for us to go in. It never occurred to either of us to do so."

"Then you don't know whether Mrs. Cuyler was alive at that time or not?"

"Why, yes, she was alive," I reminded him testily. "This all happened before the murder."

"How do you know it was before the murder?"

"Why, her husband said—" I began, but stopped at the look on his face.

"Ah, her husband *said*, did he? We're not so much concerned with what he said as we are with

what he did upon that night. Now, Mrs. Temple, if you'll be so kind, I should like you to repeat his exact words, as near as you can remember them, when you entered the room of the murder."

"I thought you were not interested in what he said?" I permitted myself this shot before complying with his request. "He didn't say much; it doesn't take much of an effort to recall his words. He told my husband that she was dead and that he was sure of that before he called us. And he said for Mr. Temple not to touch her."

"Thank you very much." He wrote something in a little notebook which straightway gave me an uneasy feeling. "Strange what unguarded things an otherwise careful man will say, have you noticed, Bailey?" he remarked aside to his seemingly sleeping companion.

I rose from my chair to conclude the interview. "If you have nothing further to inquire I will ask you to excuse me, as I have an engagement at five o'clock."

Mr. Lippman looked uncomfortable, as though he choked over innumerable questions still to be asked—which he probably did—but his zeal had carried him a little too far. There was nothing more to be got from me that afternoon.

The next day passed without event, but on Sunday another queer thing occurred, inexplicable in itself, but which joined hands ominously with its predecessors. I spent the afternoon alone, reading on the veranda. The vines formed a screen between me and the gaze of those curious ones who still gathered to stare at the scene of the Cuyler murder. Mariechen was playing in the front yard.

Occasionally she frolicked through the gap in the hedge and came across the lawn to speak to me. Her nurse was looking after her, so I didn't have her on my mind, but once the girl went into the house for something and presently Mariechen came trotting over to me with a paper in her hand.

"A man gived me this for Dranma. She's asleep."

I took the letter in my hand and instanly recognized the handwriting. It was the same as that on the anonymous letter which had so distressed Mrs. Wilding. I sat for a long time pondering the advisability of showing her this one. It was sure to contain another disquieting message, and I hated for her to know about it. I finally made up my mind that I was justified in opening it first. And when I had read what it contained I was glad

that I had done so. This was the message:

“THE DOCTOR SAYS HE WAS ALONE WITH HIS WIFE WHEN SHE SCREAMED. HE WASN’T. I WAS THERE FOR THE PURPOSE OF ROBBING THE HOUSE, AND I SAW THE MURDER. MAKE THE DOCTOR TELL YOU ABOUT THE OTHER WOMAN.”

Heaven knows that was bad enough! But it wasn’t the message itself that made me sit staring, fascinated, at that paper. On the contrary, it was the paper itself, a half sheet of the linen bond I always use and which bore at the top the familiar Temple crest—a hare and a raven, with the words “*Durante Vita.*”

N. P. had the die made for me a number of years ago, and I always have my paper marked

with it. As it is rather expensive, I reserve it for my own private correspondence and I keep the entire supply in my bedroom desk. That desk has been locked for the last few days, as I have said before, and the mystery of how anyone had gained access to it without my knowledge and helped himself to this sheet of paper was practically insolvable. And yet, yet—my eyes did not deceive me. It undoubtedly was my own paper on which I gazed, while little shivers of fear began to chill my spine even in broad daylight.

Common sense argued that it was some kind of a hoax, in disgustingly bad taste, of course; but common sense can't always satisfy our doubts. I began to feel that whatever the mystery was I could no longer bear the disquieting knowledge of it alone.

CHAPTER VI

THE ARREST

N. P. being away, I thought it best to take the letters directly to Dr. Cuyler. It seemed a pity to worry him, as I had said to Mrs. Wilding, but in the light of this second communication coming so closely upon the first, I really felt that it might be better for him to know.

He was out on a prolonged case that night, and I couldn't get in touch with him, so I called him the next day over the phone and made an engagement to take him for a ride after office hours.

I parked the Bluejay in front of the Rialto Building,, where he has his office—a foolish thing to do, as I learned later, though, of course, I never

thought of it at the time—and went to do some shopping. When I returned a little after four he was just coming down from his office. We met on the sidewalk, stepped into the car and drove at once away from the downtown district. Dr. Cuyler had very little to say, but he made an effort to reply to my chatter while we were heading out for the quieter boulevards.

It was just a week since the frightful night of Eloise's death. He had aged so much in the brief time that it might have been years. He had lost flesh, his face was haggard, and his fine eyes were darkened with the awful shadow of the tragedy. I tried a tentative question or two. The detectives he had employed were busily engaged, he told me, but as yet had found no clew to the murderer.

This was the time for me to speak of the mysterious letters I carried, and yet I dreaded to do it. Instead I slowed up the car a bit as we turned into the leafy Riverview Drive, and pretended that I wanted to let "V. V." get out and run. Then Dr. Cuyler turned to me and said gently:

"What is it on your mind, Mrs. Temple? You said there was something you wanted to speak to me about? I'm afraid my troubles are paining you too much."

I felt the color mount in my cheeks and a stricture in my throat at his considerate tone. That anyone should suspect such a man of crime was preposterous, I thought hotly. The purport of those letters was too vile to disclose to him. I was half inclined even then to let the whole matter drop, but the burden of responsibility weighed

heavily upon me. I took the letters from my bag and handed them to him.

"These fell into my hands," I faltered, "and I took care of them to save Mrs. Wilding anxiety. I wouldn't have bothered you with them either but for one thing," and I explained how they had been delivered and the curious circumstance of my paper with the crest.

Dr. Cuyler listened gravely to my story. A faintly contemptuous expression crossed his face as he examined the letters, and stuffed them into his pocket.

"Do you suppose they might be a clew to the murderer?" I asked after a bit, as he did not speak. He emitted a short, unmirthful laugh that grated on my ears.

"Not very likely. Anonymous communications

never have much value, you know. I'm sorry you should have been troubled with the scurrilous stuff."

His tone dismissed the subject. He stooped to pick up my handkerchief; and then occurred the strangest and most inexplicable of all the strange and inexplicable things which had happened since that awful night when Eloise came to her death. As he bent down, a piece of paper fluttered to the floor. I can't account yet for its presence in the car. It may be that it was in one of those envelopes all the time, so small a piece that neither the doctor nor I had seen it when we drew out the large sheet. But whether it fell out unknown to either of us when he read the letter, or whether it was placed in the Blue Jay while she was in the garage, I do not know. In view of what after-

wards happened in the garage, I'm inclined to believe the latter theory to be the correct one. At any rate, the question of how it got there didn't enter my head until afterwards. An appalling change came over the doctor's face as he glanced at this bit of paper. He turned white to the lips, and his eyes dilated with an unmistakable look of horror.

"What is it? Oh, what is it?" I cried.

He swallowed as though something obstructed his speech. Then he turned to me sternly.

"What does this mean Did you—is it possible that you—"

"I?" All the consternation that I felt sounded in my voice. "I don't understand you, Doctor Cuyler."

I took the paper from his hand and examined it

eagerly, convinced that it held some important clew. I was nonplussed when I read the single word it contained—

“Ruenna.”

The name, printed in rude letters, stared up at me innocently. What was there in that to destroy the doctor’s accustomed poise? Was it the name of a town, of a drug, or of—a woman? I resolutely put the last supposition from me.

“I beg your pardon, Mrs. Temple,” Dr. Cuyler had regained his usual composure as he turned to me again. “It was inexcusable of me to startle you so. My nerves are a bit raw lately, and that name brought back very vividly something that I have tried to forget. Please don’t give it another thought. You’ve had more than your share of my troubles, and you’ve done everything that a friend

could do that is generous and kind and sweet. If Eloise—" he paused abruptly.

"I haven't done anything at all," I protested, winking back a tear. "But I'm always ready and willing, and if there ever is anything I can do, won't you please call on me—for Eloise's sake?"

He hesitated a moment. I had the feeling that he wanted to steer the conversation away from the strange name, for presently he said:

"There is something, Mrs. Temple, that I'd be grateful if you'd give your attention to. That is Eloise's garden. There are so many flowers that need cutting, and I have no one in my house to attend to them. Could you find time to cut some for the hospital tomorrow? Eloise used to do it about once a week, I believe."

"Oh, I'd love to. I'm so glad you spoke to me

about it," I cried, secretly resolving that I would oversee the beloved place of Eloise's labors for him and keep it from neglect until he had the heart to take it up himself.

"Thank you. I knew you would. Is there any kindness you wouldn't love to do for a friend?" he asked, a sudden light glancing across his somber face. "I have no words to tell you what your sympathy means to me," he added, lifting my hand to his lips. It was but a natural, graceful manifestation of his mood and I shouldn't have given the incident another thought if at that very moment an automobile had not swung around the corner, containing of all people the Prosecuting Attorney. He shot an inquiring glance at us as he carelessly tipped his hat. I felt the blood mount in my cheeks and I was suddenly and uncomfort-

ably aware of being in a conspicuous position. I whistled sharply to V. V. who was skirmishing among the bushes, and set the Blue Jay on the wing again. Dr. Cuyler, absorbed in his own thoughts, apparently had not noticed my confusion.

We were both rather silent on the homeward drive. The Prosecuting Attorney with his hateful glance faded from my thoughts. I felt relieved from the too great responsibility I had borne and though Dr. Cuyler's face was as stern and sad as ever, the fresh air or the drive or something had driven a little healthful color into it.

It was after six when we drove up the street toward home. I noticed two men standing on Dr. Cuyler's porch and I stopped directly in front of the house to let him out.

"Don't bother about me," I said. "It's no trouble to put up the car." So with an apology for acting as I urged him, he got out and went up the walk to meet the men.

CHAPTER VII

A NEWSPAPER BOMB

America had sounded the gong for dinner and I was descending the stairs, my mind still occupied with Dr. Cuyler and his troubles, when I glanced out the hall window and saw him leaving his house accompanied by the two men we had noticed as we drove home. Almost simultaneously the telephone rang. As I entered the dining room America greeted me with a message from one of the Cuylers' maids asking that I come over at once, as Mrs. Wilding was in a sad state.

Something shivery and cold got hold of me just for a moment but I can't honestly say that I had

any premonition of the blow about to fall. Previous experience, however, had made me a little panicky about telephone summons from that ill-fated house. I hurried across the lawn with a furtive wish that N. P. was pounding at my heels. I found Mrs. Wilding upstairs alone in a tearful heap upon her bed.

"Oh, Mrs. Temple," she greeted me with sobs, "what have I ever done to suffer so much trouble? I thought my cup was full when I lost my precious daughter, but now they have taken Vincent too!"

"Taken him?" I questioned stupidly. "Taken him where?"

"They have arrested him for Eloise's murder. Think of it! Her own husband and my granddaughter's father! Oh, it is too cruel, too heart-

breaking! In his own house, and before his innocent child!" She wrung her frail old hands and wept piteously. I could not utter a word to comfort her. My tongue clove to the roof of my mouth, and there was a sudden roaring in my ears. Dr. Cuyler arrested for the murder of Eloise! Had it indeed come to that? Had the world swung suddenly and dizzily from its axis?

"But those men were not policemen," I heard myself stammering at last. "At least they weren't in uniform."

"No, they said they had been instructed to spare Dr. Cuyler all the humiliation they could. But they are policemen, and they are taking him to jail. Think of it, Courtney!—you will let me call you so, my dear?—My only child in her cold grave, and the man to whom I gave her in mar-

riage locked in the common jail charged with her murder! Oh, why wasn't I taken before I came upon these evil days?"

My heart bled for her in distress. I braced myself to the situation and did everything I could to soothe and quiet her, but I was finally obliged to send for Dr. Penrose. I waited downstairs until he came to assure me that Mrs. Wilding was at last composed and able to sleep, then I started home. At the hedge I turned back and asked for Mariechen to spend the night with me. I was suddenly afraid of my own thoughts and dreaded to be left alone with them. Eloise dead, Dr. Cuyler in jail, and N. P. gone! With Mrs. Wilding I could lament that I too had fallen upon evil days.

The blessed baby was glad enough to leave that subdued household for my pretty dining room

and America's fluffy sponge cake and ice cream. I kept her up until her head nodded like a heavy rose. When I finally put her to bed in my own room the gloomy forebodings I had been fighting settled down upon me like a pall. No tiny doubt of the doctor's innocence shook my faith in him even then, but I was oppressed with anxiety and I felt terribly helpless and alone.

Mariechen and I both slept late next morning and came down to find America grumbling over her waiting waffle batter. I tied on my small guest's bib, and when she was happily engaged with spoon and cup I opened the still damp morning paper.

“DR. CUYLER ARRESTED FOR MURDER
OF HIS WIFE. INSTRUMENT OF DEATH
FOUND IN WEEDS NEAR THE HOUSE.

PHYSICIAN IS JOY-RIDING WITH PRETTY NEIGHBOR WHILE OFFICERS WAIT TO ARREST HIM."

The room went round for a moment. Mariechen's golden head swam in a wavering sea of light. I clutched the tablecloth to steady myself, and took a deep draught from the cup of hot coffee which America had just placed in front of me. It must be that I had read it wrong. But when I gathered my courage to look at the solid print below, I found it worse even than I thought.

"This community, which a short time ago was greatly shocked by the brutal murder of Mrs. Cuyler, has again been stirred to the depths by the arrest of the victim's husband as her assailant. Prosecuting Attorney Lippman has been quietly at work upon the case and has obtained

enough evidence against the physician to justify his arrest. The most important clew to the murderer was found last Monday when men, sent to search for the snake which Dr. Cuyler claimed to have thrown in the lot next to his house, came upon a silver-headed cane marked with the doctor's initials. The heavy knob is stained with a dark substance which experts pronounce to be human blood. Dr. Cuyler, when confronted with this gory instrument, acknowledged freely that it belonged to him, but says he has no idea how it came in the place where it was found. He steadily denies his guilt. It is his theory that an intruder whom he believes to have been in his house during his absence caught up the stick from Mrs. Cuyler's bedroom, and having used it in the awful manner known, threw it into the

weeds as he fled. This is, of course, a plausible theory, but unfortunately there are other damning facts which point to the doctor as the guilty man. The Prosecuting Attorney will not give these out until the time of the trial. One significant fact is the continued intimacy between the doctor and a neighbor and former friend of his wife. This lady's husband is now absent from the city, and gossip has it that this journey is but a prelude to a permanent separation between the couple. It is known that the lady in question has been for some time closely associated with Dr. Cuyler in charitable work. The fact has now come to light that these two—friend and husband of the murdered woman—had known each other previous to the marriage of Dr. and Mrs. Cuyler.

“A few of the questions which arise in the minds of the public are: How much did Mrs. Cuyler know of this friendship? Was she killed in a fit of rage when she reproached the doctor on this lady’s account? Or did he remove her in order to make way for the other woman? Feeling against the physician is running high, and it is rumored that he will not be admitted to bond.”

For a long time I sat staring at the paper, too numb with surprise and misery to think. Then slowly my anger began to burn. It was my name that was flaunted at me through this thin veil of insinuation. It was my clean and honest friendship for an honorable man that was being dragged through the mire—it was my friend that I was accused of betraying. Oh, it was horrible, horrible! And utterly unbelievable! I crumpled

the paper in my hand and threw it under the table. In a minute I fished it up again and opened it out upon the cloth where the hateful headlines leered at me with an almost human malevolence.

How had anyone dared to write such rotten stuff about decent people? The editor of that paper must be a cur, I thought. Suddenly another alarming idea occurred to me. It was not only my name, but N. P.'s too, his fine old honorable name, that was being tattled about the town. I could picture to myself his emotions when his eye lit on the front page of that paper, and I trembled to think what he would do to the editor thereof.

It takes almost a cataclysm to arouse N. P.'s anger, he is so slow, so tolerant, so self-controlled, but when the floodgates are open—look out for the deluge! I saw it once, and I have never for-

gotten. It was a little while after we were married; a colored chauffeur was insolent to me. N. P. overheard, and he burst out on that darky just like a bull, knocked him down, and I almost thought he'd kill him before he'd finished. I don't exactly like to think about it now, but sometimes when I'm provoked with N. P. for being so easy going, I pinch myself and remember; although, to be sure, that was when we were first married, and N. P. has calmed down considerably about me since.

However, this newspaper affair was something to arouse any man with any self respect. I knew N. P. would take the first train home after he got hold of it. True to his habit, he always has the home papers follow him wherever he goes, so I had no hope that he would not see it while he was

in California. It was simply a question of time. I made up my mind that I might expect him back by the following Saturday at the latest.

CHAPTER VIII

N. P.'S SILENCE

The morning after the story of Dr. Cuyler's arrest got in the paper I wasn't a bit surprised on looking in the glass to discover my first white hair. I had lain awake most of the night worrying over the hideous net of crime which was entangling me as well as Dr. Cuyler; worrying, too, over its effect on poor N. P. If every hair in my head instead of just one had turned white I wouldn't have been surprised.

The whole thing was like a bad dream from which I couldn't waken. Even the broad light of day was not sufficient to dispel the gloom of my

thoughts. It was unthinkable that I, Courtney Temple, was being dragged through the mire of newspaper publicity like the commonest kind of woman; yet that incredible thing was the only truth in the matter. Of course every word that paper printed concerning my relations with Dr. Cuyler was a lie. I tried over and over again in the long hours of the night to persuade myself that it was only something I'd dreamed about, but the miserable truth was not to be denied. The paper had really dared to write an insinuating article about our friendship.

Unable to sleep, I got out of bed as soon as it was light, and after a cold plunge that toned me up a little, I put on a kimona and sat myself down in front of my dressing table. It was then that I discovered the white hair. I studied my reflec-

tion in the mirror; not from vanity, for I was too miserable to care that my hair was turning white and that my healthy color was bleached out to a pasty grey, but with the full determination to probe my conscience to its depths.

The thing that hurt me most of all was a feeling that somehow I'd been disloyal to N. P. I wanted to find out if I really had myself to blame, or if I was simply the victim of circumstances. To begin, then, had there every been anything in my feelings or in my attitude toward Dr. Cuyler to discredit our decent friendship? I searched my memory for the most trivial incident, going back over the years to my earliest acquaintance with the handsome young physician. He had first won my liking and N. P.'s when he brought me through a severe attack of pneumonia. I honestly

couldn't find one thing I was ashamed to remember.

N. P.'s indulgence, coupled with the fact that we have no children, has made possible for me a much freer life than most married women have. In that life of sports as well as of amusements, motoring, golfing, dancing, traveling, have been many men friends as well as women, but N. P.'s implicit trust in me has always kept a magic circle around my life. And I perfectly despise a married flirt.

Flippant, careless I might have been. And Dr. Cuyler is more than ordinarily attractive. Without him and Eloise I should have had to fare afield for company many a night when N. P. was absorbed in business or in his papers. But as for intentional disloyalty—my love of fair play rose

up just here to acquit me in the same impersonal way it would have acquitted an outsider.

"Courtney Temple, you're an idiot," I cogitated, chin in hand. "You've got so morbid over this thing you can't tell black from white. Next thing you'll be trying to persuade yourself you walked over in your sleep and murdered Eloise. Brace up, old girl, and get a little pep into you, for heaven's sake. You're no queen of the movies. You're just a plain, every-day woman whose husband is coming home, as fast as he can travel, to smash the editor of that paper into smithereens."

It was a distinctly cheering thought. The day before, I 'd been in terror of what N. P. would do. Now, after my wretched, wakeful night, I felt a real satisfaction in knowing that he would certainly do something vehement.

So I managed to whistle up my courage for the time being, but owing to my husband's extraordinary behavior, it didn't last long. N. P. has a pleasant habit of sending me a telegram or a night letter every day or so while he is away. He simply hates to write, but he wants to hear, so that is the way he gets around me. I had a night letter from him as usual on this doleful Friday, and for several days after I heard in the same way. When the fifth day brought another of those night letters making no reference to the newspaper account, and the sixth day and the seventh and the eighth—well, I didn't know what to think.

I've always heard there's no punishment like suspense, and I believe it now. As I said before, the fear that I first had of N. P.'s rage on coming home had merged into a kind of righteous satis-

faction in the anticipation. Soon that changed into burning indignation when he didn't come or even refer to the matter in the daily telegrams I received.

Was he more indifferent than I had supposed? Did he really not care what I did as long as I didn't interfere with his precious business? Was he furious, or disgusted? Was he even now instituting divorce proceedings against me in California?

Round and round in the treadmill of my mind these questions whirled, and no grist in the shape of a solution to the puzzle ever rewarded me. A new white hair came every morning. America, alarmed at my dwindling appetite, fairly outshone herself in the preparation of my dainty meals, but her best results were dust and ashes on my

lips. If it hadn't been for my neighbors' troubles and the fact that Mrs. Wilding kept me pretty busy, I think I should have taken the train for California in an attempt to clear up matters for myself.

Eloise's mother had come to regard me as the final resort in every emergency. She called me up to know what to give Mariechen to eat; what privileges to allow the second girl; to find out what dessert Dr. Cuyler liked best (this was before his arrest.) All the thousand and one crises of housekeeping she trustfully referred to me.

Even in matters outside the house I had to take a hand. There was the time the man came from the florist's with some plants Eloise had ordered early in the spring. Mrs. Wilding didn't know where they were to be put. Would dear Courtney please come over and show him?

I didn't know either, but I said I would come. I found the florist's man, a mild spectacled person, waiting patiently on the side verandah, a great hamper of plants beside him.

"All these?" I exclaimed in dismay. "Are you sure that Mrs. Cuyler ordered all these?"

"Yes, ma'am. Here's the bill for them."

"But this isn't the time of year for setting out plants." I glanced toward the garden, shimmering with color in the warm June sunshine. "It's too late for these things now."

The florist's man was apologetic.

"Well, ma'am, to be sure, it is. But these are very rare varieties sent especially for Mrs. Cuyler, and we had some trouble in getting them. They ought to have been here a month or six weeks ago. They came in a shipment to us this morning, and

Mr. Harrowgate told me to bring them right over."

"Well, I'm going to tell you to take them right back," I began, determined not to be imposed upon. And then I check my hasty speech. Was it my place to give orders here? I suddenly saw the matter in the light of the town's gossip. This would be a nice tidbit for the Morning Gazette. "Mrs. Cuyler's friend countermands her orders, given before her death." I looked keenly at the little man. How did I know that he was not in the employ of the paper itself? He looked innocent enough, but I had no assurance that he wouldn't go straight from the garden to the editor of the Gazette with this new item. I was trusting nobody these days. So I changed my tone and asked blandly.

"What would you advise about them? Of course I want to do as Mrs. Cuyler would wish."

The shade on his face lifted perceptibly. "Well, I think there's several of these that can be set out all right. It's too late for some, and those I'll have to take back to the greenhouse. We might sort them over if you can spare the time."

He began unpacking the hamper with careful hands. V. V. trotted up and commenced sniffing at the man's feet.

"Don't mind him," I said reassuringly. "He won't bother you."

"Oh, I know this dog," he answered. He gave V. V. a friendly pat. "We got acquainted a while back when I took this order. Now, here's a *Camellia Japonica*. *That'll* have to go back, all right. And these *Gefion Phlox*. I don't believe we'd better risk these in the open ground. But now these *Pompom Chrysanthemums* and the *Delphi-*

nium—they can go in as well now as earlier. Shall I set 'em out for you, ma'am? Mrs. Cuyler talked them over with me when I took the order, and I know about where she meant to put 'em."

"Do," I assented with relief. "I know very little about gardening, and I suppose you know a lot."

"Quite a bit, yes, ma'am," he answered modestly. "I've always loved flowers, and I've worked with them on and off most of my life. I wouldn't want to do anything to spoil this garden, either. It's about the prettiest in town according to my notion."

He set to work with enthusiasm, talking unexpectedly well about the flowers and their likes and dislikes. I watched him with a new ache in my heart. Eloise's flowers, frail, ephemeral things, were alive and blooming in the sweet summer sun-

shine, while Eloise—I caught myself up sharply. I was getting too much in this habit of dismal reverie.

“What about all these bulbs?” I inquired. “What can we do with them?”

“Oh, they’ll keep nicely until fall if you put ’em in a dark place. All but these iris. Fall’s the time for setting out tulips, hyacinths and daffodils, but iris is different. You dig ’em up in the fall and set ’em out again in the spring.”

“We might try putting these out now,” I suggested, beginning to grow interested in the matter. “That hedge has nearly stopped blooming. Why shouldn’t we dig up some of those plants and put in these bulbs instead?”

The little man was horrified.

“Oh, no, ma’am. I guess you don’t understand

about these iris. They're something very special—Paleta, they're called—and the bulbs cost three dollars apiece. The hedge is just Japanese iris, pretty enough, but nothing like these rare ones."

"I see," I replied with proper awe. "We mustn't insult these aristocrats by putting them with the common herd. But oughtn't something be done with that hedge? It seems to me it's entirely too thick. We might thin it out a bit, anyway. I'd like to keep it in good condition, Mrs. Cuyler was so proud of it."

He tried to conceal how greatly my benighted state of ignorance shocked him.

"It's perfect just as it is now," he declared anxiously. "You'll make a great mistake if you touch it, if you'll excuse my saying so. Take out a clump here and there, and you'll never have the same unbroken symmetry again."

"Very well," I acquiesced, a little weary of the subject. "I'll let it alone, and I'm much obliged to you for the interest you've taken. You can leave this bill with me. Dr. Cuyler will settle it with Mr. Harrowgate."

He bade me a pleasant good-morning, and departed. I gave no further thought to the little episode then, but I've wondered since if things might not have been different had I followed my impulse and insisted then and there upon the thinning of the hedge.

CHAPTER IX

AT 1:10

"Miss Co'tney, is you-all heerd 'bout de hant at de doctah's?"

I looked up from my desk to see the fat form of our cook standing in the doorway, her cushiony black hands resting on her hips. It was the day after my interview with the florist's man in Eloise's garden. No more recent emergency had arisen requiring my assistance at the Cuylers', and I was devoting the temporary lull to an overhauling of my papers and bills.

"No, I hadn't heard," I replied. "What kind of a haunt is it?" The quickest way to get rid

of America is to let her say her say and be done with it.

"Hit's a bell," she told me, nodding her head mysteriously.

"A bell? What sort of a bell? What does it do?"

"Hit rings. Yas'm, hit rings ebery night at de time Mis' Cuyler was done killed. An' Mis' Wilding, she just about crazy in de haid."

"America," I said sternly, "what nonsense are you talking? If anything were wrong or out of the ordinary at the Cuylers', I'm sure that Mrs. Wilding would have sent for me."

"Yas'm, that whut she do now. That no-count, light-complexion Melba, she say will you-all come ovah 'cause Mis' Wilding she ain't feeling lak she ought to. An' Melba, she say dat bell sure does ring loud. She and de nuss gal dey heerd it 'way

up in de third story and hit lak to scared 'em white!"

I went over to Mrs. Wilding, wondering what fresh thrust Fate had given the little lady. I hadn't paid much attention to America's story, but to my surprise Mrs. Wilding practically confirmed it.

"The first time I heard the bell," she said in response to my question, "was four nights ago, the Monday after Vincent's arrest. It pealed through the house, and I sprang up, thinking it was the telephone. But when I took down the receiver Central declared that no one had called. I went back to bed, almost convinced that it had been part of a dream. The next night it came again, and last night, too; and always at the same time."

"And that time was?" I asked fearfully. Our eyes met.

"It was ten minutes after one precisely."

This was the approximate hour at which it had been decided that Eloise met her death. Mrs. Wilding's white face and trembling hands told that she was aware of this coincidence.

"Well," I said briskly, after a moment's reflection, "we'll solve the mystery without any more ado. I'll telephone an electrician and have the house wires examined."

But, to my surprise, Mrs. Wilding put out a frail hand to detain me.

"My dear, I wish you wouldn't. Not now, at any rate."

"Not have the matter investigated? But why, dear Mrs. Wilding? Don't you want to know what is causing that strange ringing?"

"No, I'm not sure that I do," she answered bravely, though her face flushed with embarrassment. "I know you'll think me a superstitious old woman, but I have a feeling that it would be better for us all if we made no effort to fathom this mystery."

"You don't—surely you don't think it is connected with Eloise in any way?"

She looked down for a moment in silence, then spoke with soft firmness.

"Courtney, it's like this. The winter before Eloise was married she had an illness which was largely a nervous one. She did not care for the nurse we had for her, and she often wanted me to sit with her, especially when she could not sleep at night. I had a bell put in my room with the button at the head of her bed, and when she

grew too nervous to sleep she would touch this button, and the bell rang in my room. Then I would go and sit with her until she grew quiet. Now—it rings just as it did before, and I can't—try as I will—I can't rid myself of the idea that my child is calling me—is wanting me even in the place where she is gone.”

Mrs. Wilding buried her face in her handkerchief and sobbed quietly. I stood aghast at this revelation. I did not doubt for an instant that there was some perfectly natural explanation of the bell, and it horrified me to think of the long hours of suffering this already heart-broken mother had endured.

“Dear Mrs. Wilding,” I exclaimed, “let me stay with you tonight and hear this bell for myself. Perhaps I can explain it for you without any outside help.”

She grasped my arm convulsively.

“You must not ask anyone about it. I will not have this talked over by outsiders who would see nothing in it but an old woman’s ridiculous superstition. I would not have mentioned it at all, but that the maids have heard it, and I knew they had spoken of it to your cook. You’ll promise me? Thank you, my dear. And I shall be very glad if you will stay with me tonight.”

So it was settled, and when the time came I was on hand for my investigation.

Mrs. Wilding seemed grateful for my companionship, but she retired early, leaving me alone in the Cuylers’ guest room. I did not go to bed; I merely exchanged my gown for a negligée and sat down with a book to await the hour of one. The book was not interesting, but my thoughts

were, and I spent the time alternately in the rehearsal of scathing speeches which I would deliver to N. P. if I ever saw him again, and in speculation about Dr. Cuyler in his lonely cell. The little Dresden clock on the shelf at last pointed to one.

I turned off my light and went softly into the hall. I seated myself on the top step and waited breathlessly, my teeth clicking together as I remembered what had taken place at this hour of another night in the room across the hall. Would the mystery of that tragedy ever be solved? Would we ever know whose feet made their stealthy way up the steps, halted before the door of the blue room, and passed in on their sinister errand?

Ting-a-ling aling! Loud and sharp through the house pealed a bell. Listening for it though I

was, I started violently at the sound. It was so shrilling, so insistent! I tried to decide from what part of the house it originated, but other than that I judged it to come from beyond the hall, I could not locate the source. It rang for perhaps ten seconds, then stopped, though the echoes seemed to linger for much longer. A moment later a door opened, and Mrs. Wilding appeared in the hall.

"You hear?" she asked me quietly. Her face was very white, but she seemed not to be afraid. "O Eloise, my child! What is it you want of your mother?"

I shook off the numbness that enveloped me.


"I'm going down to the kitchen and look around," I announced firmly. "Someone is playing upon your natural grief by a cowardly trick."

But she put her arms around me and clung piteously.

“Don’t, Courtney, please don’t! I don’t want you to do anything about it. And it wouldn’t be worth while anyway. I’ve thought this over carefully and I’ve come to the conclusion that it is a warning of my own end. My daughter is telling me in this way that I am to join her in death as I went to her in illness. I accept it as such. God knows I’m glad to go.”

There was nothing I could say which shook her in this morbid conviction. I recognized the fact that her nerves had not recovered from the awful shock they had received. It was useless to argue with her, but I resolved in my own mind to do a little quiet investigating in the morning. I felt I could look about and still keep the letter of my promise to Mrs. Wilding.

But when morning came I entered upon a day which drove all thought of the mysterious bell from my mind. I hope that I may never spend another such twelve hours. It all grew out of the desire to be of service to Mrs. Wilding. At the breakfast table she asked me if I would perform two tasks for her—tasks which she herself dreaded to undertake. Of course, I assured her of my willingness to help her in any way I could.

“First,” she said, playing nervously with her fork, “is to put away Eloise’s clothes. I spoke to Vincent about them, and he wishes everything given away except a few things which are to be kept for Mariechen. It is my duty to attend to this, I know, but I cannot bring myself to handle the garments which are so closely associated with  my darling. Will you—is it asking too much to

desire you to do this for us—for Mariechen and me?"

"Certainly not," I answered. "I will begin directly after breakfast. And the other thing you wanted done?"

"Is to go to the cemetery and see if they have sodded the grave as Vincent directed. He sent me word yesterday that he would like to have me see to it. I suppose you will think me a very useless somebody not to do these things myself but, Courtney, I dread it so—"

"I know," I told her gently. "Don't worry about it, dear Mrs. Wilding. I will see to it this very afternoon."

We were about to leave the table when the door leading from the pantry was flung open and America made an unceremonious entrance.

“Foh de lan’ sakes, Miss Co’tney, what kind of gwines on is dese? Ghos’es in dis house an’ ghos’es in de rideabout barn, and burglars in we-all’s house.”

“Burglars in our house? What in the world, America?”

“Yas’m. In Mr. Nat’s house dey wuz.” America rolled her eyes with unction. “Sure as yo’ bawn, Miss Co’tney, dey been dar dis very night. I went in yo’ room dis mawnin’ to air it out and you jes ought to see whut I done seed! De desk all open, and de drawers all emptied out an’ de debbil to pay sho. You-all jes come and look.”

I acted upon her advice at once, assuring Mrs. Wilding that I would return as soon as I had seen to my affairs.

I found things as America had said. My desk

had been ransacked, and the contents of both chiffonier and dressing table emptied upon the floor. I made a careful inspection of the confusion but I could not see that a single article was missing. My purse lay as I had placed it, in a small inside drawer of the desk. To be sure, this drawer was very tiny and unobtrusively placed, but it seemed incredible that the thief should not have found it, especially when he had the place to himself for an unlimited length of time.

I decided the best thing to do was to summon the police and I was on my way to the telephone when I picked up a slip of paper which speedily caused me to change my mind. It was a half sheet of my own notepaper and it bore the single word, "Ruenna," written over and over on it. The writing was the same as that of the anony-

mous letters with which I had grown so unpleasantly familiar. As I stood looking at the minute scrap pregnant with unuttered meaning Dr. Cuyler's face rose before me—white, drawn, marked with unmistakable horror as I recalled it when I had seen that name before. I realized suddenly that this was no ordinary housebreaker who ignored money but possessed himself of notepaper.

Who was Ruenna? The question beat upon my brain with insistent force. A woman's name of course. Was she young? Was she beautiful? Above all what could she have been to Vincent Cuyler? "Ask him about the other woman." For the first time those letters began to assume importance in my mind.

I put the bit of paper away and set about restoring order to the room. It would not do to

call the police. They could give me no help in this matter and it might well be that an inspection of the place would lead to some damaging evidence against the doctor. I was wholly convinced of his innocence; I was perfectly sure that nothing really incriminating could be found against him. And yet—and yet—I could not put the remembrance of his moment's terror from my mind.

I had dismissed America to her work some minutes before and I sought her now to warn her against speaking of the burglary—if one can call it a burglary when nothing of value has been taken—then I went back to Mrs. Wilding.

I had not entered Eloise' room since she had left it for the last time. Involuntarily my eyes travelled to the bed and then to the blue couch where she had lain on that last sad day. Only

a rug before the bed made the room seem different from the way I had seen it hundreds of times before. But no gracious figure moved about here now, no lovely voice bade me welcome as it had so many times when I ran in for a morning chat. All that was left to remind me of Eloise here were her dainty garments and appurtenances—and under the rug a brown stain.

It was eyrie work handling those clothes. I took from the drawers piles of fine lingerie and sorted them out to the best of my ability. Her ivory brushes and toilet furnishings I packed carefully away; her jewels I shut safely into a curious metal casket which stood on the dressing table and left it there for her husband's disposal. Then I went to the clothes closet and began removing the gowns. Each had its intimate asso-

ciation with the wearer. There was the lavender dimity that Eloise sometimes wore mornings; a white crepe dinner gown; a black lace that had formed a perfect setting for her fair beauty. I lifted down the blue negligé I had seen on the foot of her bed on that dreadful night and as I held it for a moment in my arms I thought that in all probability it was the last gown my friend had ever worn.

Was she happy when she donned it for that last time? Was she thinking lovingly of her little daughter's birthday on the morrow? And was her heart warm with love for her husband because of his thoughtful gift? I wondered where that bracelet was now and if it was really for that Eloise had been killed. It was a beautiful jewel and it was not beyond the bounds of probability some

passerby had seen its brilliant sparkle and that his cupidity had been excited.

I shook the gown gently to straighten out its hanging folds, as I carried it toward the cedar chest in which I meant to lay it. Was I mistaken in thinking I had caught a gleam of gems in those soft folds? I walked toward the window and examined the pretty thing carefully. There in a tiny handkerchief pocket inside the gown was the bracelet—the sapphire bracelet that Vincent Cuyler had given his wife.

So there had been no robbery! *Had there been no robber?* My very soul sickened as I realized what this admission implied. If it was not a burglar, who then had killed Eloise?

Suddenly I thrust the bracelet in the breast of my gown. I would not tell of my discovery; until

after the trial, at any rate, I thought fiercely. There was enough damaging evidence against him without this.

My silence and pallor when I came down stairs were set down to the trying task I had just finished, and Mrs. Wilding was full of soft remorse at having put this strain upon me. She was insistent that I stay for luncheon but this I resolutely declined. I felt that I must get away from this house of tragedy and mystery for a time. And I had yet to fulfill the second of Mrs. Wilding's requests.

So I escaped to the haven of my home; to the reassuring presence of America, who touched by my white face tucked me up on my couch, brought me a bountiful lunch on a tray, and insisted with

autocratic kindness that I take a rest before going out that afternoon.

I obeyed her willingly, for I had been pretty well shaken up by the morning's work.

CHAPTER X

RUENNA

The little sleep refreshed me and about three o'clock I got out the Blue Jay and drove to the cemetery. Mrs. Wilding had told me where to find the grave, and I went directly to it. The men were even then at work upon it, but I could see as I reached the place that they had not accomplished much. Indeed the flowers still lay, brown and withered, in great masses upon the mound, entirely concealing the earth below.

"We're a little late getting at this job," one of the men explained, touching his hat respectfully. "We had two more to sod and we run out of sod

and had to wait till we could get another load. But we'll have this done in an hour, sure."

I stood watching them as they lifted off what had so lately been exquisite blossoms. These they tossed aside and began to loosen the earth, preparatory to placing the sod upon it. An exclamation from one of the men startled me. I came nearer and saw the man stoop and pick up some object from the ground.

"My shovel struck against it," he said, and handed it to me as though he recognized my right to examine it. The object proved to be a package, wrapped in a fold of oilcloth and tied with a string. Wondering, I broke the cord and bent over what lay within. A photograph confronted me. With a presentiment of what it was I hastily rewrapped it and spoke to the men.

"I will take this with me," I told them. "It is something which must be given to the lady's husband," and without waiting for their comments or objections if they were minded to make any, I walked away. But before I left the cemetery I sought a bench under a tree in a secluded corner and examined the picture with care. It was the face of a woman—a young and beautiful woman, I should say. The eyes were large and expressive; the lips full and a trifle sensuous; heavy masses of dark hair crowned her head. The dress was in the fashion of some years ago; ten or twelve as nearly as I could determine. The pasteboard below had been cut away, undoubtedly to destroy the name of the photographer and the city in which it had been taken. I turned it over and on the back were some words clear and black as

though freshly written. As I recognized the hateful writing which confronted me at every point I could scarcely repress a shudder. The name was "RUENNA," and underneath was written "THE OTHER WOMAN."

Here was a clue with a vengeance. Not only the name but the likeness of the woman in the case. I thought despairingly that the toils were certainly closing around Vincent Cuyler and I seemed fated to be the instrument of his undoing. If this should come to the notice of the Prosecuting Attorney—but he should never know of its existence, I told myself with determination. I would put it away with the sapphire bracelet and the slip of paper I had found on my bedroom floor that morning—how long ago it seemed! and when this trial was over and Dr. Cuyler walked

among his friends a free and vindicated man, I would give them into his care. So I planned confidently; but even as I tied the string once more about the oilcloth covering, a hand was extended and a stern voice said,

“I’ll take that, Mrs. Temple, if you please.”

I turned with a start and my eyes met those of Bailey, the detective. How long he had been behind me I had no means of knowing. I afterwards found that he had been watching me—shadowing, is the detestable way they put it, I believe—ever since Dr. Cuyler was placed in jail. He had followed me to the cemetery; had stood at a little distance while I talked to the men; had seen them give an object of some sort into my hand; and then he had crept up behind me and had tried to see over my shoulder what it was that was occupying my earnest attention.

It didn't take me long to recover from my astonishment at seeing him and I was so angry that it never occurred to me to feel afraid.

"I'll take that," he repeated.

"I think you won't," I told him coolly.

"Oh, yes, I will, my dear madam. That object interests me immensely. You see, I saw where it came from and it's certain to have some connection with the murder. So just hand it over and save yourself trouble."

"What trouble? Do you mean to try to take it from me by force? I think I wouldn't if I were you. You look pretty soft," I told him cruelly. "And if worst came to the worst I can always use my lungs, you know. There is a man mowing the grass not a hundred feet away."

"I'm not going to take it from you," he replied

with annoyance. "I demand that you give it to me in the name of the law," he finished pompously.

I laughed.

"Keep that sort of bravado for some ignorant girl or frightened old woman. I know that you have no authority to demand this. You are not an officer yourself and even if you were you have no papers which entitle you to make such a demand. This package has been placed in my hands to deliver to Dr. Cuyler and it will stay in my care until I have fulfilled my trust. Now are you satisfied that you will not get it? Then please stand aside; I am going."

He opened and shut his mouth several times but the words he wanted—words which would overwhelm me with the sense of my own audaci-

ty and irreverence, would not come. I passed him without a glance and walked hurriedly out of the gate. Once in the Blue Jay I threw on the power and sped swiftly down the boulevard. Over my shoulder I saw the detective climb into the machine which was waiting for him and start after me. He was following me—actually he dared!

I led that miserable Bailey with his salt-pepper-vinegar-mustard suit of clothes such a chase that it is a thousand wonders I wasn't arrested for speeding. Up one street and down another; across this avenue, down this lane, I went in my saucy Blue Jay, while the other car came after me. To his credit and that of his car I will say that I wasn't far ahead of them at any time but my word! he was near nervous prostration before I pulled up in front of my own house. It was un-

dignified, as was forcibly brought to my attention later, and I might have been killed in that mad race. But when I parked the Blue Jay and demurely climbed my own steps, the sight of that man's face was worth any risks that I had taken. Rage, disgust, baffled desire for revenge all fought for supremacy in his red countenance; and though I entered the library and sank into a chair on the verge of exhaustion with all I had been through since I got up that morning, I felt that I had had at least one crumb of satisfaction in that trying day.

CHAPTER XI

THE MYSTERY OF THE GARAGE

"Ghos'es in de rideabout barn." America's words had made little impression on me at the time, but I was soon to accord them deep respect. For several days my rotund cook and self appointed guardian had been throwing out hints as dark as her face. Finally on Monday afternoon she came into the living room and boldly broached the subject.

"Dey's ghos'es in de rideabout barn," she announced with portentuous solemnity.

"Oh, America," I said wearily. "What have you go up your sleeve now?"

She rolled apprehensive eyes in my direction.

"De good Lawd keep me fum gettin' anything lak dat up ma sleeve," she muttered. "Go on and laff at ole America if you lak, Miss Co'tney, but dey sho is somepin mighty mysterious in dat air barn."

"What is it like this time? Bells again?"

"No'm, hit ain't no bells dis time. Hit's lights! Yas'm! Lights dat come an' go an' noises dat ain't made by no human foots."

"When did you hear and see all this?" I inquired.

"I been seein' dat light for mos' a week, an' las' night I wuz comin' in de back way from visitin' Mis' Newcome's Sallie, an' I heerd dat noise. I tell you I ain't stoppin' none to see what makes hit!"

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“Why didn’t you tell me about it then so I could have investigated the matter?”

“Well, you see, Miss Co’tney, you done been ober to Mis’ Wilding’s and when you come back you look so tired lak, I ’low I won’t bother you none twell de zoological moment arrive, and hit ’pers to be now.”

“Very well, America, I know about it. Tonight I’ll see if I can lay your ghost.”

After she had gone I studied the matter with some care. Allowing for America’s exaggerated view of what she had seen and heard I came to the conclusion that there must be something occurring in the garage of which I should know.

I am not sure that I have explained the situation of the garage. When the Cuylers bought the place next to us they were obliged to build a garage

for their car. Then N. P. decided to get a car and he and the doctor built the garage together. It was really one building, although his half stood on his land and our half on ours, and there was no communication between. A partition of heavy boards separated them and the sliding doors opened on each yard. This plan had not only saved expense in building the garage but it had taken up the minimum of space. Our side was locked. That I knew for I had the key in my purse; but to make sure I went down and examined the door. It was as I thought locked by a padlock. I couldn't tell, of course, whether the doctor's was secured or not, as the hedge entirely separated the yards at this point. I went inside our garage and looked around. The Blue Jay stood perkily awaiting my pleasure, and N. P.'s dust coat

and cap hung on the wall. Worn out tires, heaps of cotton waste, oil cans, in short, all the usual appurtenances of a small garage were scattered about, but as far as I could see there was nothing to indicate that anyone but myself had entered the place since N. P. left.

I closed and locked the door again and returned to the house, but I made up my mind that I would stroll out that way in the evening and see if I could find the cause of America's mysterious lights and noises.

I had visitors that evening and it was after ten when they left. I had completely forgotten the "ghos'" and it was the sight of America waddling around on her nightly errand of locking doors and windows that recalled it to me.

I slipped out the side door and walked toward

the rear of the lawn. Even as I went, I saw a thin ray of light through the high barred window of the garage. It shone for a minute and then disappeared. I was seized with an overpowering impulse to flee to the house and I had taken several hurried steps in that direction before I pulled myself together and faced about the other way. I crept close to the building and listened. From within there came the faintest of noises. America had not exaggerated. There was some one inside who was moving stealthily about.

The light came and went fitfully. I judged it was made by an intermittent flashlight. When I had satisfied myself that I was not mistaken I ran back to the house and called the police station. This was an opportunity to investigate one mystery, at any rate, unhindered by an old lady's mor-

bid fancies. I stated the case to the person who answered my call and he assured me they would have a cycle officer on the spot within ten minutes. It was barely that when I heard the explosions of the motor as he came along at a terrific rate of speed.

I was waiting for him at the front steps, chaperoned by America. I briefly explained the situation and handed the officer my key to the place. Pistol in hand he walked out to the back yard and up to the door of the garage, America and I skulking along at his heels. The "barn" was dark and silent. The officer fitted the key into the lock and then cautiously pulled open the door a crack.

"Come on out of there," he said in burly tones. "I've got you covered, so don't try any funny business. Get along out now!"

There was no answer, no sound indeed but America's excited gasps. The officer opened the door wider, a bit at a time, until he was able to step inside. His flashlight searched every corner, but nothing in the shape of a crouching and desperate intruder was to be seen. I called the officer's attention to the switch at the side of the door and in a minute the place was flooded with light. We entered and made an exhaustingly thorough inspection, even poking the pile of waste in our zeal. There was no doubt about it—no one was there.

"How do you suppose he got out?" I asked the officer. He shook his head patronizingly.

"There wasn't no one here to get out, Miss. You saw for yourself that the door was locked and there's only that one window, too narrow for a

man to get through and too high up, and barred besides."

"But there was some one here," I insisted stubbornly. "I tell you I saw a light and heard somebody moving about."

"Now, Miss, he said in a soothing tone, "let me tell you how it was. You're all worked up and nervous about that business next door and with your husband gone and all, it's natural you should be. Maybe you saw a light from some auto going by in the street and it shone in here and you thought it came from inside. Now ain't that reasonable?"

"But the noises? I suppose they didn't come from the street?"

"They was probably caused by a rat inside. You see there ain't no one here now and they ain't been

no one, without they got through that locked door and nothing but a ghost could do that."

America emitted a squeak and pulled at my sleeve.

"Come on in, Miss Co'tney, chile, dere ain't no use tryin' to ketch a ghos'. Let 'em alone, or yo'll make 'em mad. Come on in de house"

There seemed to be nothing else to do although I was far from accepting the ghost theory. However, I thanked the officer, bade him goodnight and returned to the house. After I had gone to bed I lay thinking about the matter and I made up my mind that I would do a little searching the next night for myself.

Accordingly when morning came I went to the cellar and dragged out a small step ladder used by our chauffeur in cleaning the windows. I took the

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opportunity to do this when America was busy upstairs for I didn't want her to know what I intended doing. I leaned this ladder not far from the garage and waited for night to come. I told America I would attend to the locking up that evening and although she was very reluctant to allow this, I sent her to bed before me.

At half past ten I slipped out of the house and once more made my silent way to the garage. Ah! There was the light again and the faint, stealthy noise! I knew I had not been mistaken! The triumphant consciousness of this made me forget whatever nervousness I may have had at first.

I picked up my ladder and carried it softly to the window of the garage. Inch by inch I lowered it against the side of the building, fearful that I

would alarm the intruder by some sudden noise. But I had it in place at last and the sounds within continued. I gathered my skirts about me and began the ascent of the ladder. It was somewhat shaky and I thought every moment the thing would topple over with me. I got to the top step without mishap and leaned forward to look through the window. All this time a dim but steady light had been shining and the curious scraping noise went on. The window was a little above the level of my eyes and I grasped one of the bars to pull myself up. At this moment—the zoological one, America would have said—the treacherous ladder lurched dizzily, and in striving to regain my balance I overreached myself and came crashing to the ground.

For a few minutes I thought I was killed, but

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after a cautious inventory of my bones I decided that with the exception of a few bruises and scratches, physically I was as good as ever. Not so my mental condition, however! I was mad clear through as I realized that all hope of discovering our nocturnal visitor was over, for that night at least. The noise of my fall must have frightened him away, although I found when I arose and went to look, that the door was still tightly locked.

This time there was no incredulous policeman or frightened cook to talk down my belief. In the brief instant that I swayed on the top of the ladder I had caught a glimpse of some dark object within, which, partly concealed though it was by the hood of the Blue Jay, I felt convinced was the form of a man. He was crouched on the floor in a listening attitude, and the faint light in the

place came from the floor. Of these two facts I was sure, and nothing could shake my conviction.

There was nothing further I could do about it tonight. I reconnoitered cautiously around the garage, looking for a possible clew to his entrance. Only darkness and silence rewarded me. Long after I had gone back into the house I puzzled over the mystery. What was that man doing in our garage? Why did he return there night after night? Above all, how did he get into a perfectly closed building?

I debated with myself what was the thing to do next. Should I explain matters to the chief of police and ask for a cordon of officers to surround the house after ten o'clock? If they were all as dense as the one I had had here the previous evening they wouldn't be of much use, I thought ruefully.

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Oh, if N. P. were only here! N. P. wouldn't laugh at me and deride my burglar as a ghost. N. P. knew that I wasn't an hysterical coward given to conjuring terrors after nightfall. N. P. would believe me when I said there was a man in the garage, and N. P. would find a way to discover that man, or something would have to give!

I fell asleep still undecided what course of action to pursue, puzzled over it all the next day, and when evening came again and brought no further disturbance to the garage, no lights, no noises, I concluded and told America that I had laid the "ghost." Of course, my noisy fall had frightened the intruder away. I hardly knew whether to be glad or sorry. At any rate, it relieved me of the necessity for immediate action; in the meantime I entertained the forlorn hope that N. P. might still come home to my rescue.

CHAPTER XII

“MARIECHEN’S HORSIE”

One excitement tumbled on the heels of another in those days! It was the next morning that I received notification that Dr. Cuyler’s trial was set for the following Monday, July first, and that my husband and I were subpoenaed as witnesses for the defense. That was all very well for N. P. miles and miles away and knowing precious little if he did testify, but alas! poor me! I had been in the thick of it from the very beginning, and was primed with all sorts of damaging evidence which I greatly preferred to share with no one. If only I were in California or Kamschatka or Zululand

—any place where I could escape from the whole miserable mess.

No such luck for me, however. With a perfectly fatal tendency I had managed to be on the spot every time a new development arose in the now celebrated Cuyler case. It was foolish even to hope that I could escape at this late hour. I resigned myself to the inevitable and began to plan how little I could tell.

Mrs. Wilding received the news of the trial more composedly than I had supposed she would. She believed implicitly in Dr. Cuyler's innocence. It was touching to see how absolutely she trusted him. The shock of his arrest and the shame of his confinement to jail had been a tragic thing for her, but the trial itself she regarded as a sure means of his vindication. The sooner, then, that

it began, the better, according to her point of view, and I was thankful that she felt so.

I have often wondered if she knew the loathsome rumors that were flying about the town concerning her son-in-law and me. If she did, she kept the knowledge to herself with fine delicacy. She seldom read the newspapers, and she shrank from any discussion of family affairs with an outsider, so it is possible she never knew. At any rate, she trusted me through that wretched time—something that I still remember with gratitude.

“You spoil me dreadfully, Courtney, dear,” she said to me one day. “I’m getting to rely on you for everything. But indeed I don’t know what I should do without you.”

The remark was occasioned by my timely intervention during a childish tantrum of Mariechen’s.

I had heard her screaming from my yard, and knowing how it distressed her grandmother, I ran across the lawn in my composite rôle of peace-maker, champion and protector. It is wonderful to think what trivial circumstances lead to great discoveries. I hadn't the slightest idea when I went over that I was going for anything but the purpose of quieting Eloise's baby, but as things turned out, it was enough to make me embrace the doctrine of predestination.

Mariechen is a perfect lamb most of the time, but once in awhile she has a naughty fit, as all children will. On this occasion she was crying her heart out over a lost plaything which none of the household could produce.

"Hush, hush, dear little girl," Mrs. Wilding was vainly pleading with her as I entered the room.

Her hands trembled as she turned to me, and her delicate face was almost as red as the child's.

"O my dear, I'm so glad to see you," she greeted me. "Here's Mariechen making herself perfectly sick over something she wants, and I *don't know* where to find it for her."

"Why, darling," I exclaimed, "whatever is the matter? Come here, you blessed baby, and tell Auntie Court the trouble."

"I—I want my horsie," Mariechen wailed at me. "My dear pretty horsie what my Muvver let me p'ay wiv."

"Your horsie, precious? Tell me where it is."

"I don't *know* where it is. I frowed it away 'cause it hurted me so bad." More tears and sobs. "It was a bad horsie, and it bluggied up my nose, so I didnt' like it for awhile. But now I want it, I do, I do!"

I gathered the weeping baby into my arms and looked inquiringly over her head, first at the grandmother, then at the nurse-maid.

"Can't you find her rocking horse, Melba?"

"Don't want my wocking horsie; don't want my gee gee; don't want my aut'mobile!" She cast a scornful glance at the toys on the floor. "I want my yiding horsie wiv the shiny head what used to live in Daddy's closet. Muvver gived it to me to yide on one day, but Melba won't give it to me now. She's naughty, naughty Melba."

"Oh, she must mean a stick," I cried, light breaking over me. "One of the doctor's walking sticks. Haven't you seen it, Melba?"

Before she could answer Mariechen slipped from my lap.

"I'll show you where I frowed it, Auntie Court,"

She tugged at my hand. "It hit me in the face and bluggied up my nose, so I frowed it away."

She ran to the window and pointed with insistent finger. Suddenly an intuition seized me, so strange, so wonderful I hardly dared entertain it. Breathless with the thought, I hurried Mariechen into the yard as fast as her fat legs could carry her.

"Was it here you threw it, dear?"

"No, no!" She stamped with an impatient foot. "Not here. I frowed it 'way over there."

It was as I had suspected. She pointed to the weeds in the vacant lot where Dr. Cuyler had thrown the dead snake and where the supposed death instrument had been found.

I could hardly control myself as I stumbled on the great discovery, but I managed to speak calmly to the child.

"Well, Auntie Court will get your horsie presently," I assured her, "but first I want you to tell me exactly how he looked. Did he have a long black body and a silver head?"

"Yes, yes!" She bobbed her curls ecstatically. "A booful shiny head."

Her tears were dried in anticipation but it was some time before I was able to restore her treasure to her. I hurried in to the telephone and called up the office of the Prosecuting Attorney.

"This is Mrs. Temple, Mr. Lippman. Can you come out to Dr. Cuyler's house at once? I have some information for you."

My tone evidently aroused his curiosity for it was not fifteen minutes before his machine buzzed up to the door and he got out, accompanied by the ubiquitous Mr. Bailey.

I made Mariechen go over her story again, explaining and interpreting those terms which were not understood by the men. I blessed Eloise for the careful training she had given her little daughter. She was not a bit shy or tongue tied as so many children are in the presence of strangers. I could see that Mr. Lippman was impressed.

"That would account for the blood, you see," I stammered in my excitement. "You believe the child? You think her story is perfectly plausible?"

"It seems so," he admitted with some caution. "But I'd like to try a simple test, if you don't object. I'll have to take the little girl to my office and I'd like you or her grandmother or both to go along."

He looked at Mrs. Wilding and she in turn

looked at me. In the end of course we both went, she to chaperon Mariechen and I to chaperon her. I ran over home to get my hat and we started down town at once.

The Prosecuting Attorney had two offices and it was in the outer one that he bade us be seated while he arranged matters to his liking within. Presently he called to us and we went through the door which closed behind us. A long table occupied the center of the room. A desk, chairs and a bookcase were the only other articles of furniture. On the table and on the top of the closed desk were scattered several objects—umbrellas, books, a yard stick and other things.

“Now, little lady,” the attorney said in what he meant for a jocular tone, “you just look around the place and see if you can find your horse.”

We watched in breathless silence while the big brown eyes travelled around the room. Over the table, the desk and the bookcase they searched, lingered earnestly on the walls, studied the chairs. Then with a gleeful shout the baby ran to a corner of the room and snatched up something which she hugged to her breast.

"Here's my horsie! Mariechen's found her boo-ful horsie!"

I turned to Mr. Lippman with, I fear, an air of hardly concealed triumph. He was watching the child meditatively, his gaze bent on the smart walking stick which he had so fondly believed to be the instrument of Dr. Cuyler's crime.

"This will make everything all right for Dr. Cuyler, won't it?" I questioned excitedly. "How soon will they dismiss the case against him?"

The Prosecuting Attorney gave me a pitying glance.

“You didn’t really think this would prove his innocence, did you, Mrs. Temple? You’re too smart a woman for that. It simply shows that one link in our chain of evidence is a false one; but we have many others, Mrs. Temple, many others!”

CHAPTER XIII

THE TRIAL

So it happened that Dr. Cuyler came to trial on the following Monday. Mr. Brewer, the lawyer for the defense, thought it best that Mrs. Wilding should sit beside her son-in-law within the enclosure, deeming the effect of her presence on the jury a favorable one. The dear little lady begged me so piteously to sit there with her that I had not the heart to refuse, especially as Mr. Brewer added his request to hers, but I realized perfectly how the tongues of gossip would wag to see me publicly allied on the side of Dr. Cuyler.

I will pass over the first few days of the case,

filled as they were with the tiresome swearing in of the jury. But the speech of the Prosecuting Attorney I will give in part, for it astonished everybody, me most of all.

“The state will show,” he said, standing upright before the “twelve good men and true”, “that for some time there had been unhappiness between the defendant and his wife. His profession carried him largely among women. He was—and is a personable man and perhaps traded on his popularity with the other sex to increase his practice. His wife objected; objected to his being so much with other women and especially to his friendship for the wife of one of their near neighbors. The state will show that upon the evening preceding the murder Dr. Cuyler sat for some time in close conversation with this woman, whose name I will

not now mention, while the neglected wife was brooding alone in the house. The evidence will show that upon his entrance into the house she reproached him for his conduct. That he retorted with much bitterness. That she threatened to sue for divorce. That he, knowing that such an action would have a serious effect upon his professional life, and in a fit of violent rage, struck her repeatedly upon the head with some instrument unknown to the court. That the scream which was heard by Mr. and Mrs. Temple, their next-door neighbors, was caused by her terror as she saw him approaching her with intent to kill, and not by any snake, as the defendant has claimed. That the doctor then waited for a time, probably for an hour, when he got out his car and drove about for the purpose of later establishing an alibi. To

further this end he stopped in a drug store and ordered some medicines to be delivered at his office the next day. He spoke to two men who were in the drug store, laughingly remarking that a doctor's life was a hard one, thus calling to their attention the facts of his appearance and profession, that they might afterwards testify to his being there at that hour. The evidence will show that Mrs. Cuyler was not dead when he left her, but that he, with the knowledge of anatomy he possessed, was convinced that she would die within an hour or so, and knowing that he left her, thus making it appear to whatever medical aid was summoned when he arrived that she had been struck during his absence. But the evidence will show that she lived until he returned; was probably drawing her last breath as he came up the

stairs. That he waited until he was certain she was dead before summoning assistance. The state will prove that after making the call upon his patient he became afraid that he had betrayed himself to that patient or his wife in some way—perhaps there were blood stains somewhere about him; or perhaps he was in an uncontrollable state of agitation. At any rate the patient—one Peter Rossbaum—disappeared from the city and no amount of search has ascertained his whereabouts. It is known that the doctor drew out a sum of money the afternoon previous to the murder and that he has not satisfactorily accounted for its expenditure; the fact being without doubt that this money was paid to Peter Rossbaum and his wife on consideration that they disappear from the city and remain away until after the murder had

ceased to be a matter of public interest. All these facts, gentlemen, the state will prove and the evidence will show."

When he sat down I stole a glance at Eloise's husband. He was sitting with folded arms, a quiet, almost a pensive look upon his face; from his expression one might have imagined he had not heard a word of the Prosecuting Attorney's speech. Mrs. Wilding on the contrary was trembling with indignation and I put my hand on her arm soothingly.

The minor witnesses were called first. Two neighbors living in the next block testified that they had heard nothing on the night of the murder until the police ambulance arrived; that they had never known of there being snakes in the vacant lot next to the Cuylers' house. Nothing of

importance was brought out by their testimony one way or the other and they were not cross examined.

But when the fourth witness took the stand the court room got a surprise. This was the manager of the local telephone exchange and he testified that it was the custom of the company after eleven o'clock at night, to keep a record of any call for a private house. This was done, he explained, to save people the annoyance of being roused from their beds by a possible mistake.

"The number called for is written down and the name of the person having that number is found. Then the party calling is asked if he wishes to speak to that person rather than to that number. If he does, the call is given; if he has mistaken the number he wishes, the mistake is point-

ed out to him. In that way we know what calls are made upon private houses after eleven o'clock."

Pros. At. "And does that record show that a call was sent in for the Cuyler home before one o'clock on the night of June third?"

"There is no such call noted on my records."

This reply created a sensation. It was in response to a telephone summons, the doctor had said, that he had gone to see this Peter Rossbaum. My heart sank as I saw this black mark being placed upon the doctor's story and I looked eagerly at Mr. Brewer when he began a cross examination of this witness.

I believe I have said very little about Dr. Cuyler's attorney. I was greatly disappointed when I first saw him. He was a huge man, his chin

hanging in pendulous folds upon his chest. He sat with his finger tips barely meeting across his vast front, his head down and his eyes peering over his spectacles. After a bit I observed that this quiet, intent gaze seemed to disconcert some of the witnesses and that they floundered in their testimony. He began with the telephone manager in a manner misleadingly bland.

Q. "Now, Mr. White, you say that such a record is kept in the telephone office—such a record as you describe?"

A. "I do. It is."

Q. "Where is it kept? I mean in what part of the building?"

A. "In my own office."

Q. "And in consulting that record at the instance of the Prosecuting Attorney you found no

record of a call having been sent into Dr. Cuyler's home after eleven and before one o'clock on the night in question?"

A. "I found no such record."

Q. "Now, Mr. White, you say this rule applies to private houses only. Not to hotels, or restaurants, or the police station?"

A. "No, it does not apply to them."

Q. "But it does apply to private houses?"

A. "Yes, sir."

Q. "To all private houses?"

A. "Well, not to all, no, sir."

Q. "Ah, not to all, eh? Well, to whose houses does it not apply?"

A. "To the houses of nurses and the chief of police and —"

Q. "Go on. And—"

A. "To the homes of physicians."

Q. "Just so; to the homes of physicians. And Dr. Cuyler is a physician?"

A. "I believe he is."

Q. "You know he is. Therefore there would have been no record made—your report would not show if there had been a dozen calls at Dr. Cuyler's home that night?"

A. "I suppose not."

Q. "Very good, Mr. White. Now, just one more question. Is it not a fact that you were dropped from the Country Club of which Dr. Cuyler was at that time president because of a little—ah, indiscreetness, shall we say? in a game of cards?"

A. "I was dropped from that club, yes, sir."

Q. "Well, well, we all have our little longing

for retaliation," the attorney for the defense remarked benevolently and dismissed the discomfited witness with a wave of his pudgy hand. There was a general smile through the room. The Prosecuting Attorney did not smile, however. He had hoped a good deal from this promising bubble and it had been punctured with ease by this irritating lawyer.

The next witness was a woman I had never seen before—a Mrs. Miller who gave her address in the extreme opposite part of town. She testified that she had sat behind the Cuylers in the theatre at a certain date, and had heard Mrs. Cuyler reproach her husband for his attentions to other women. She declared that the doctor was very angry; had looked "as though he could kill his wife." Personally I don't believe the woman ever

saw Eloise in her life but she made a strong witness for the state as she clung to her story through the fire of cross examination.

A Dr. Hillboro was called next. He stated that he had seen the defendant the night of the murder, somewhere about twelve o'clock, "driving like mad, three miles north of the city, his face pale and set and his manner intent." Questioned as to his own reason for being at that place at such an hour he said that he had been to see a patient and was returning home. The patient was next called and confirmed Dr. Hillboro's story of having been at place named at the hour and date stated by him. As the road mentioned was far away from the residence of Peter Rossbaum, I could see that this fact made an unfavorable impression on the jury.

I had been summoned of course as a witness for the defense, so it was with the greatest surprise mingled with some fear, that I heard my own name called at this juncture. I walked the short distance to the witness stand as firmly as I could and after being sworn I took my seat. I faced the room and up to this time I had not realized how crowded it was. The aisles were jammed and there were people leaning all around the sides of the room. For a few moments it seemed to me that all those eyes were charging me with the murder, but I soon became so occupied with the storm of questions hurled upon me by the Prosecuting Attorney that I no longer saw them. I give the report of my examination as it stood in the papers:

Q. "State your name."

A. "Courtney Temple; Mrs. N. P. Temple."

Q. "Where do you live, Mrs. Temple?"

A. "At 452 Ashland Boulevard."

Q. "And you were living there at the time of the murder, June fourth?"

A. "I was."

Q. "That is next door to the Cuylers' home?"

A. "It is."

Q. "You know this defendant?"

A. "I do."

Q. "How long have you known him?"

A. "I have known him for perhaps eight or nine years."

Q. "That is, before his marriage?"

A. "Yes."

Q. "And before he began to practice in this city?"

A. "No."

Q. "How long had you known Mrs. Cuyler?"

A. "I think it is six years; since she came here a bride."

Q. "You were on friendly terms with Mrs. Cuyler?"

A. "Very friendly terms."

Q. "And with Dr. Cuyler?"

A. "Yes."

Q. "You have been associated with him in philanthropic work?"

A. "I have; yes."

Q. "Was Mrs. Cuyler interested in this work also?"

A. "In some of it, yes."

Q. "But not in all of it?"

A. "No. You see, in some—"

Q. "Just answer the question I asked, please, Mrs. Temple."

A. "Not in all of it."

Q. "Now, Mrs. Temple, will you please tell the jury whether your friendship with Dr. Cuyler was greater than with Mrs. Cuyler?"

Mr. Brewer: "I object to that question, your honor. He has no right to ask it."

The Court: "Objection overruled. Witness may answer the question."

A. "There was no difference in the degree of my friendship with the Cuylers. I was friendly with both."

Q. "But being associated with Dr. Cuyler in this work—closely associated as you were, you would naturally become more friendly with him than with his wife, would you not?"

A. "No."

Q. "No? Why wouldn't you?"

A. "Because I was much more closely associated with Mrs. Cuyler. I sometimes did not see the doctor for several days at a time, but I rarely passed a day without paying Mrs. Cuyler a visit or receiving one from her."

Q. "And you think that Mrs. Cuyler returned your friendship?"

A. "I am confident of it."

Q. "Now, Mrs. Temple, on the night that Mrs. Cuyler was murdered, I believe that you were the first person to enter her room after the murder, were you not?"

A. "With the exception of Dr. Cuyler, yes. My husband was just behind me."

Q. "Will you tell the jury, Mrs. Temple, in what condition you found the defendant?"

A. "He seemed dazed."

Q. "Did you regard his behavior as usual under the circumstances?"

A. "I cannot answer that question."

Q. "Cannot? Why?"

A. "Because I do not know what is the usual behavior under such circumstances. I have never before seen a man in the presence of his murdered wife."

Q. "Ah—yes. All right, Mrs. Temple. Now please state to the jury what were Dr. Cuyler's words on that occasion?"

A. "He did not say anything that I know of until my husband suggested moving Mrs. Cuyler, and the doctor said, as nearly as I can remember, 'Don't touch her. She is dead.'"

Q. "And is that all he said?"

A. "No; I think he added, 'I was sure of that before I called you.' "

Q. "*Was* sure, or *made* sure?"

A. "I don't know which word he used."

Q. "If you searched your memory very carefully, don't you think you could tell?"

A. "To the best of my recollection, he said *was* sure."

Q. "And it didn't strike you as being strange that he used such an expression at the time?"

A. "Certainly not. He is a physician."

Q. "Now, Mrs. Temple, did you or did you not take Dr. Cuyler for a drive in your own motor car on the afternoon preceding his arrest?"

A. "I did."

Q. "What was your purpose in doing so?"

A. "I wished to consult him on various matters

concerning his family life, and I did not want to go to his office or ask him to my home."

Q. "I see. Well, Mrs. Temple, will you tell us what you talked about during that drive?"

A. "Various matters. I cannot recall them all."

Q. "But you can recall some of them, can you not?"

A. "Yes. We discussed the advisability of sending the doctor's little girl away to the seashore for a time, but decided it would be better for her to remain where she was if her grandmother, Mrs. Wilding, would stay with her."

Q. "And what else?"

A. "We talked about my husband's journey and Dr. Cuyler spoke of his not having looked well lately."

Q. "And what else?"

A. "I believe Dr. Cuyler asked me to care for his wife's garden and to send the flowers to the hospital, as she had been in the habit of doing."

Q. "Was that the extent of your conversation?"

A. "No, we talked a bit longer, but I cannot remember just what was said."

Q. "Let me see if I cannot refresh your memory. Was there not mention made of some letters—anonymous letters received by you?"

A. "I believe there was."

Q. "Ah, strange you didn't remember that before, wasn't it? Now, about those letters, Mrs. Temple. Where did you obtain them?"

A. "The first one was given to me by Mrs. Wilding, who said a man had handed it in at

the door. The second I took from Dr. Cuyler's small daughter, to whom it had been given by a strange man."

Q. "You will tell the jury, Mrs. Temple, the purport of those letters?"

A. "They contained ridiculous hints of another woman."

Q. "Please leave out the adjective. It grows out of your own opinion, not the facts. Now what did you do with those letters?"

A. "I gave them to Dr. Cuyler."

Q. "You gave them—do I understand you, Mrs. Temple, that you gave them to the defendant in this case, and not to the proper authorities?"

A. "Dr. Cuyler was not then the defendant in the case, and I considered him the proper person to have them."

Q. "What did he say when you told him of the—or gave them to him?"

A. "He expressed his regret that I should have been annoyed, but said he didn't attach very much importance to them."

Q. "What did he do with these letters?"

A. "He put them in his pocket, I think."

Q. (Producing letters) "Are these the letters?"

A. "Yes, I am sure they are."

Q. "Very good. Now, Mrs. Temple, I want you to tell me about the visit you paid to the cemetery—June twenty-first, wasn't it?"

A. "I went there on that date."

Q. "Not since then?"

A. "No."

Q. "For what purpose did you go at that time?"

A. "I went at the request of Mrs. Wilding to see if Mrs. Cuyler's grave had been sodded as Dr. Cuyler had ordered."

Q. "And had it?"

A. "Not when I arrived. The men were just beginning the work."

Q. "You stood and watched them for a time?"

A. "I did."

Q. "And one of the men took some object from the earth on the grave and gave it to ~~you~~?"

A. "He did."

Q. "What was that object?"

A. "It was a photograph wrapped in oilcloth."

Q. "And what did you do with the photograph?"

A. "I took it home with me."

Q. "Did you refuse to surrender it to Mr. Bailey, a detective?"

A. "I did. He had no authority."

CHAPTER XIV

THE TRIAL CONTINUED

Here I must resort to my own words to describe what followed. I had expected to be questioned about the photograph, and I was resolved to describe it in such a way that, while not deviating from the truth, I would leave the court—and the doctor—completely in the dark concerning the identity of the woman. But I reckoned without the Prosecuting Attorney. To my horror, he took from the table before him a brown paper package which, being unwrapped, disclosed the very picture I had left safely locked in my desk that morning. I learned afterwards that an offi-

cer, armed with a search warrant, had entered the house and in spite of America's angry protests had gone straight to the desk and obtained not only the photograph but the sapphire bracelet as well. Mr. Lippman required me to identify the picture as the one I had brought away from the cemetery, and then he turned it slowly in the direction of Dr. Cuyler.

There was a breathless hush as the defendant leaned slightly forward to look at it. There had been only an expressionless calm upon his face up to this time he had not even evinced a curiosity to see the features of the woman whose likeness had been interred in his wife's grave. But as he obtained a clear view of the picture he started from his chair with a low exclamation.

There was a significant pause. The state's at-

torney was far too clever a lawyer to mar the effect of that revelation by a single word. He merely laid aside the photograph and turned to me once more.

Q. "Will you tell the jury, Mrs. Temple, if you remember seeing the sapphire bracelet which Dr. Cuyler gave his wife on the evening of her death?"

A. "I do."

Q. "When did you see it?"

A. "I saw it on Mrs. Cuyler's arm as we stood talking by the hedge. She removed it and handed it to me to examine."

Q. "And that was the last you ever saw of it?"

There was a pause. Almost I determined to answer "Yes," but the thought of the oath I had taken before I sat in that chair prevented.

"No," I replied, "I have seen it since."

The stir in the court room showed the awakened interest of the spectators. Truly I was proving an exciting witness.

Q. "I will ask you to tell the jury when and under what circumstances?"

A. "I was putting away some of Mrs. Cuyler's clothing at the request of her mother, and I found the bracelet in an inside pocket of the gown she last wore."

Q. "When did you find this?"

A. "On June twenty-first; the morning of the day I went to the cemetery."

Q. "Did you show the bracelet to Mrs. Wilding?"

A. "No."

Q. "Did you notify the Prosecuting Attorney?"

A. "No."

Q. "Or the counsel for the defense?"

A. "No."

Q. "In fact, you did not tell anyone of this discovery?"

A. "No."

Q. "Where did you put this bracelet?"

A. "In the desk in my bedroom."

Q. "Now, Mrs. Temple, knowing that the loss of this bracelet was a strong indication that burglarly had been committed and that Mrs. Cuyler had been murdered in defense of this jewel, you allowed the recovery of this bracelet to remain unknown—knowing as you did that it removed all idea of there having been a burglar?"

A. "The question is somewhat involved, but I suppose I did know that it proved there had been no robbery."

Q. "And no robber?"

Objection offered by the defense on the ground that the question called for an opinion and not a fact. Objection overruled.

A. "I did not—I do not know there was no robber."

Q. "But you think it is likely?"

Another objection by Mr. Brewer, but before he had completed it I had already replied:

A. "I have no opinion on the subject that I wish to offer."

Q. "Now, Mrs. Temple, realizing that by removing the idea of a robber, the evidence against Dr. Cuyler was materially strengthened, why did you conceal that bracelet?"

A. "I do not admit that it strengthens any evidence against Dr. Cuyler."

Q. "Then why did you conceal it?"

A. "I was waiting for the return of my husband to obtain his advice as to what I had better do with it."

Q. "Have you written Mr. Temple about it?"

A. "I have not."

Q. "And yet you tell this jury that you wished his opinion about the disposal of the bracelet?"

A. "I did, and I do."

Q. "That is all, Mrs. Temple for the present. I shall recall you to the stand later."

I sat down with a hopeless feeling that I had injured Dr. Cuyler's case irreparably. I had made it perfectly evident to everybody that I had concealed the photograph and the bracelet because I believed their appearance would implicate Eloise's husband. I couldn't explain—indeed, I

wouldn't have been allowed to if I had wished—that it was because of what they seemed to imply, not because I believed there was any real guilt in their presence, that I had not turned them over to the state's attorney. All in all, I had done quite as much damage as I feared I would. Oh, if I only hadn't had to testify!

I was the last witness on the third day of the trial, and when court adjourned it was openly said among the spectators that the case against Dr. Cuyler looked very dark indeed. Mrs. Wilding and I were allowed to speak to him for a moment after the curious throng had pressed out.

"I'm afraid I've played the mischief with your case," I told him with a flippant attempt to cover my emotion. Dr. Cuyler's dark eyes met mine with a look of understanding.

"You're true blue, Courtney," he replied, "but you couldn't help yourself this morning."

It didn't occur to me until I was nearly home that he had never called me Courtney before. Poor, poor Dr. Cuyler! I didn't care what he called me, but I couldn't help wondering if Mr. Lipman had overheard and attached his customary significance to a quite insignificant fact. "Give a dog a bad name and hang him." I was applying the proverb to my own troubles, but a shudder passed over me as I realized how truly it applied to Dr. Cuyler. An icy lump settled in my breast as I parted from Mrs. Wilding and thankfully retired to my own home to hide my head.

CHAPTER XV

N. P.'S RETURN

That evening at dinner I received a belated message from N. P. announcing that he would be home in the morning. I was of two minds about going to meet him. The train got in at seven thirty, and the early hour would have been sufficient excuse for not going if I had cared to use it, but I knew from his telegram that he hoped to find me waiting in the Blue Jay. It would have been the best possible way to placate him. The day after that sensational account in the paper I would have been down on the platform in his favorite frock, my hair done in the tame little fashion he likes best, when the train pulled in.

But three weeks had elapsed since then; three weeks of strange, chilling conduct on N. P.'s part and of worry and trouble on mine, and I was on my dignity. So I sent a taxi to the station and waited leisurely at home to receive him.

America had a wonderful breakfast to welcome him, waffles and broiled chicken, and I don't know what all. She invariably kills the fatted capon when he comes home, though after he has been back a day or two she relapses into her customary habits, queer, dear, exasperating old soul that she is.

I managed to delay my toilet so that I was just pinning my belt when the taxi drove up to the *porte cochère*. I peeked through the curtain, and the moment N. P. stepped into view I knew that something had happened. He was thin—for

him—so that his clothes hung queer and loose. Then he had the men carry in his heavy suitcase, a most extraordinary performance for N. P., who is the kind that always carries his own loads and often other people's, too.

I heard his hearty greeting to America, then the usual question—

“Where's Miss Courtney?” and I left my dignity behind as I ran downstairs to meet him. I found him in his favorite leather chair in the living room, fanning himself with his hat and panting a little. His face startled me, it was so hollow cheeked and had such dark circles under the eyes.

“N. P., you've been sick and never told me,” I accused him as I flung myself into his arms.

He held me close and patted me gently as if I were a little girl.

"There, Courtney, it's all right. Nothing to worry about now. Bless your sweet heart, I'm glad to see you again!"

It was hard to get a full confession from him. He was just out of the hospital, he admitted, after an operation for appendicitis; a little shaky but perfectly all right, he explained, and with a clean bill of health from the doctor in San Francisco. The details I had to drag out of him by the hardest.

He had been seized with a severe attack the day after he arrived in California, he told me. The doctor had pronounced it appendicitis and hustled him off to a hospital, assuring him that an immediate operation was imperative. There was no time to send for me, so in order to save me anxiety N. P. had conceived the brilliant idea of dis-

patching a series of his usual messages, just as if nothing were the matter.

He wrote them all out before he went to the operating room, and arranged at the hospital to have one sent every day while he was there. He chuckled as he told me of his astuteness, but it struck me in a different way. I swallowed hard as I thought of his unselfish consideration for me at such a time.

"Oh, N. P.," I cried. "I'm so ashamed I could eat the dust. If you knew all that's been going on here, and how hurt and indignant I've been that you didn't pay any attention to me!"

"I know now," N. P. said grimly, "but I didn't get hold of a paper until the day I came out of the hospital. Then I took the first train for home."

"Didn't get hold of a paper?" I echoed him. "Why, I supposed you had them every day. That's why I was so surprised—and mad."

"I was mad, too." A whimsical smile edged along the stern line of his mouth. "You see, it was a Catholic hospital, and they had a lot of darn fool rules and regulations; wouldn't let a patient have the newspapers, for one thing—too stimulating, they said. The Sisters make good nurses, but my Lord! they're worse than America to get around. I tried to persuade and threaten, and even to bribe them, but I might as well have approached Bunker Hill Monument. As long as I was on my back I was helpless in their clutches."

There was something so ludicrous in the picture of N. P. being bulldozed by a Catholic Sister that I burst out laughing. But the thought of his re-

cent danger and my childish lack of faith in him sobered me again. I might have known there was some good reason for his conduct. N. P. never had failed me before when I needed him. Why couldn't I have trusted him?

"You don't look to me as if you had any business to be out of bed," I told him sternly. "Why didn't you stay in California until you were stronger, and let me come out to take care of you?"

"I expected to do that, but the minute I got wind of Cuyler's troubles I changed my mind. I thought the place for me was right here. Then you know I had to come anyway when I was subpoenaed."

"Of course. I hadn't thought of that." I stole a sidelong glance at him. "What—what do you

think about it all?" I volunteered the sheepish question. Oh, what a hideous position I was in, smirched, as I felt, in N. P.'s eyes.

"What do I think?" He flung around towards me with his customary vigor. "I think it's a damned outrage, that's what I think! I beg your pardon, Courtney," he added as an afterthought. "I forgot myself for a moment."

"I don't care if you forget yourself again. Somebody ought to swear about it, and of course I can't. Oh, N. P., tell me truly, you don't blame me?"

I hadn't meant to ask him any such thing, but somehow the question burst from my lips. My husband looked at me a moment as though he hadn't heard me aright.

"Blame *you*, child?" he asked in a puzzled way.

"What for?"

"Didn't you see that awful article in the Gazette about Dr. Cuyler and me?" I faltered.

A sudden change passed over N. P.'s face; kind and good as he is, he looked for the moment as implacable as an Indian. His big fist clenched in sudden passion.

"Yes, I saw it," he admitted. "I'll see Adams about it, too, in good time. The low-down, sneaking cur!" He broke off abruptly and checked his rising wrath. "We won't talk about him now. He's hardly worth the powder to blow him up."

I was so relieved that I couldn't speak for a moment. N. P. looked at me, and then I think he understood.

"My poor little girl!" he said softly, and I went straight into his arms again.

"Don't let's talk about me, either," I urged,

pressing my head close to his breast. "I've been a thousand different kinds of a fool, and you're the best, the dearest—"

"You-all comin' to breakfus' dis mawnin'?" America inquired from the dining room. "De chicken's 'bout burnt up while you-all's lalligagin in dar."

CHAPTER XVI

THE IRIS HEDGE

N. P. insisted on going down to the court room as soon as he had swallowed breakfast. I was not to be recalled until the next morning, but I went along as usual to sit with Mrs. Wilding. It makes me smile even now when I think of the stir that N. P.'s entrance into the court room caused that morning.

He marched boldly inside the inclosure, exchanged a warm handclasp with Dr. Cuyler, made a great fuss about the placing of my chair, and then turned a truculent gaze on the Prosecuting Attorney. It was so exactly the look of a boy

who squares his shoulders, doubles his fists and yells, "Come on!" that for an instant it seemed as if the state's attorney would accept the challenge. I watched them out of the tail of my eye with a demure enough expression, but secretly I was gloating over my big, whole-hearted champion.

"Oh, you don't know what a blessed relief it is to have you home," I said to him for the hundredth time that evening when we were enjoying an after-dinner stroll about the yard. N. P. beamed at my remark. I had been telling him all the hair-raising experiences I had been through in his absence, beginning with the anonymous letters and ending with my tumble off the step-ladder the night I tried to lay America's "ghos'" in the garage.

"Miss the old man a little, did you, eh?" he inquired comfortably. "Strikes me somebody's been pretty plucky through it all, anyway."

"Part of the time it was just a bluff. Mrs. Wilding's afraid of her shadow, poor little dear, and somebody had to be brave. But I've done about all of it I care to, thank you. From now on I'm going to hide behind your coat-tails every time anybody says 'scat,' and I'm never going to let you get an inch away from me again."

Arm in arm, we sauntered across the grass, laughing at my foolishness. Our vagrant footsteps brought us close to the iris hedge. With the memory of that starry night a month ago when Eloise had stood here with me, my light-hearted mood vanished.

"It was just here that I saw Eloise alive for

the last time," I voiced the thought that often came to me. "She did look so adorable that night, like a beautiful flower herself among all these silvery blue blossoms. Oh, N. P., *why* do you suppose anyone would want to kill her, so lovely and so gracious, so charitable towards every soul? I don't believe I ever heard her speak an unkind word of anybody in all the time I knew her."

N. P. was idly poking in the hedge with his stick, and made no attempt to answer. He too had been fond of Eloise. I knew by his silence how deeply my words had touched him. We moved along down the hedge, his stick waving in and out among the long, swordlike leaves.

"I believe she loved this hedge better than anything in the whole garden," I continued my mournful reverie. "I was really glad when it

stopped blooming, the fragrance reminded me so of her and I couldn't get away from it. It's all so suggestive of her awful death."

A sudden shiver ran over me.

"Don't think about it." N. P. patted my shoulder. "Let's get away from here if that's the way it makes you feel. Hello, what's this?"

The silver tip of his cane had come in contact with some hard object, and a curious metallic sound resulted. He stooped and patted the dense leaves.

"What the dickens?"

I bent over to see what he had brought to light.

"What is it?" I asked, straining my eyes through the rapidly-falling dusk.

"Seems to be some kind of a vase," N. P. replied.

"A vase? *Eloise's vase!*" I cried with swift intuition. We examined it a moment in startled silence. It was indeed the bronze vase which had disappeared from Eloise's room the night of her death. Its heavy base was darkly stained, and matted all around it was a handful of golden hair. Eloise's hair, her lovely, silky hair, smeared and stiffened with her blood!

"That's the thing he did it with," I shuddered, clutching N. P. "Oh, don't you see? He must have hidden it here that night."

"I believe you're right," my husband agreed, turning it thoughtfully in his hand. "It's heavy enough to have crushed her head like an egg-shell."

At his words my taut nerves gave way, and for the first—I trust the last—time in my life, I thoroughly and violently had hysterics.

N. P. threw one arm around me and swept me into the house, carefully holding the vase in the other hand. In the midst of my excitement I remember noticing that he carried his arm stiffly outstretched from his body. I suppose even now N. P. has nerves, though this was the first manifestation of them I had ever seen.

He called America, and with her assistance put me promptly to bed. Thanks to their ministrations, I finally relaxed and grew composed. N. P. sat beside me for a long, long time, his big hand clasping mine while I slept and dozed and waked and dozed again. Finally, I suppose I released him by falling asleep in earnest. I don't know how long I slept, but I awoke in the dark to find him gone.

With a confused idea as to the time, I switched

on the electric light. A glance at his pillow showed that he had not been to bed. I hastily consulted the clock on the bedside table. It was ten minutes past one. Where in the world was N. P.?

The dread coincidence of the hour brought me wide awake. I jumped out of bed and ran into the hall to call him. The house was dark upstairs and down. I pushed the button at the head of the stairs and light flooded the lower hall. In an unreasoning panic I ran swiftly from room to room, calling his name.

He was not in the house. The thought of the garage came to me with sudden poignance. Had he gone out there to investigate the mysterious happenings I had told him about? I unlocked the kitchen door and peered out toward the garage. The same faint, tantalizing light that I had seen

before shone from the window. My heart beats quickened with alarm as I stumbled down the steps and over the narrow gravel walk.

"N. P.!" I called sharply. "Where are you?"

Oh, the relief to hear his blessed voice, a little muffled but triumphant.

"All right, Courtney, I've got him! Go back in the house and call the police, will you? Tell them I have the man who murdered Mrs. Cuyler."

The shock of this announcement stunned my wits. I hurried into the house and obediently summoned the police, but I have no idea what I said. It must have been sufficiently startling, for the man at the other end of the line let off a series of stacatto exclamations which I did not wait for him to conclude.

I heard N. P.'s voice outside briskly admonishing someone to "step along there," and I turned with tightly-locked hands to await their entrance. My imagination raced ahead to meet some heavy, low-browed brute, but when the door swung open, revealing N. P. with his prisoner in his grasp, I leaned against the wall and laughed and laughed.

"Oh, N. P.," I gasped. "Is that all you've caught? That's no murderer! That's — why, that's the man from Harrowgate's Flower Farm."

The mild, spectacled gaze of the quiet little man with whom I had spent an hour in Eloise's garden met my eyes.

"Flower nothing!" N. P. growled, taking a fresh grip on his captive. "I tell you, he's the man who murdered Eloise Cuyler! He admits the fact himself."

"I didn't say I murdered her," the man protested equably. "I merely killed her, as Dr. Cuyler did my wife. An eye for an eye, a head for a head. *He* is a murderer, if you like."

"What in heaven's name does he mean?"

I stared at the shabby figure, convinced that the man had lost his reason.

"I'll tell you all about it later," my husband said with terse kindness. "Meanwhile I hear the patrol, and if you don't want to appear in that pink thing you have on—"

It was maddening, but I heard myself the clang clang of the police motor as it dashed up to our door, and I had barely time to gain the upper floor before the men began to file in.

CHAPTER XVII

THE MAN IN THE GARAGE

Why I didn't expire of curiosity and suspense during the remainder of that night, I'm sure I don't know. N. P. went down to the police station with his prisoner, and later to the jail, where he breakfasted with the doctor. He telephoned me from there that everything was all right and that he'd be home later to explain—precious poor consolation in my state of mind. I waited on tenterhooks until he returned somewhere towards the middle of the morning.

"Just about ready to burst, aren't you, Courtney?" he greeted me as I ran down the steps to

meet him. "'Twas a shame to go off that way and leave you in the dark, but I reckon you'll forgive me when I tell you how it all happened."

"Better be quick about it, then," I recommended. "Come on the porch where I have something nice and cool for you to drink. You can tell me everything while you're getting rested. Poor dear, you look so hot and tired."

He followed me obediently. When I had him comfortably established, the electric fan buzzing over his head, the ice tinkling in his glass, I felt that patience had ceased to be a virtue.

"Now commence! Why? How? No—first of all, tell me if Dr. Cuyler is free?"

"Yes, thank the Lord!" was the fervent answer. I did wish that rascalion editor of the Gazette could have seen the expression on N. P.'s face

at that moment. He certainly wouldn't have believed him a very jealous husband then.

"Well, that's all right then. Now begin with what you did after I went to sleep last night."

"After you went to sleep last night? Let me think a moment. Oh, I'll tell you what I did. I went over to the doctor's yard and looked at the house. That bell story had been on my mind ever since you told me about it, and I was determined to find out the cause of the noise. An electric bell doesn't ring without a wire connected somewhere, and it was that wire I was looking for. I found it without any difficulty. It was wound inconspicuously about the wire leading from the doctor's garage to the house. The cook was still in the kitchen, so I went in and told her I wanted to do a little investigating. For a

bit I could find no bell, but after poking around awhile I discovered one very cleverly hidden beneath a shelf.

I went back out to the Cuylers' garage and made a careful search, but I could find nothing. The wire came through a crack in the outside wall and disappeared in the flooring. I examined that carefully for loose boards, but there weren't any. Then I went inside and continued my investigations. And here I was more successful. It was a good thing we put off cementing the floor until old Hunt could do the job, for it was due to the wood flooring that I discovered what I did. I pulled at the boards near the spot on my side where the wire entered the floor on the other side. And sure enough, one board was loose. I pried it up, and the next one to it as well. What

do you think I found? A nice little storage battery all complete, and arranged so that by means of a key switch the man was able to ring the bell in the Cuylers' pantry."

"I just knew it was something like this," I exclaimed triumphantly. "Of course, I wouldn't have had the gumption to work it all out the way you did, but if Mrs. Wilding had only been willing to let me look—"

"I'm just as glad she didn't," N. P. said quietly. 'Wait until I tell you the rest. It was about ten o'clock then, so I came up on the porch to have a cigar and think things over while I waited for the ghost to walk. If you remember, it was always later than eleven-thirty when he appeared, but I thought I'd take up my quarters before then. I remembered your experience, and I de-

cided to make the garage my base of operations. For the life of me, I couldn't see how the fellow got into the place when it was locked. But I meant to find out that evening. So in about an hour I went quietly down there, making myself as inconspicuous as possible in case anyone was looking that way from across the street. I crawled into a corner behind a linen robe that was lying there—nice warm spot to spend a summer night! I suppose I'd been there another hour when I heard a noise that made me sit up and take notice. It seemed to come from the garage, and yet it didn't. I peered cautiously out from a corner of the robe and strained my eyes to see. It was pretty dark in there, only the starlight from the window making things visible at all, but my eyes were well accustomed to it, and I could make out

nearly the whole place. The noise seemed to come from about where the battery was, and I glued my gaze to that spot. First thing you know, one of the big partition boards between the rooms bent slowly in, and your ghost wiggled through the opening. The fellow had worked there before until he had drawn all the nails in the boards where they were fastened to the beam above, and it was an easy matter for him to replace them after he left each night.

I had him covered from under the robe, but I wanted to see what he was up to, so I lay low and waited. He had a small electric torch with him, and he put this on the floor and began to pull up the loose flooring where his storage battery was hid. When he had it all uncovered he pulled out his watch and commenced to talk to himself in a low, meditative tone."

"What did he say?" I asked with deep interest.

"Oh, nothing very intelligible. He muttered a great string of nonsense about 'a life for a life and an eye for an eye.' "

"And 'a head for a head'," I burst in. "I know. I heard him say that, too."

"I didn't hear him say anything about a head. You must have imagined that," N. P. corrected me. "There wouldn't have been any sense in that."

"There isn't any sense in any of it, as far as I can see. Well, go on."

"Where was I, anyhow? You do interrupt so, Courtney. Oh, yes, and then he said, 'Once more at the joyful hour will the bell peal forth its paean of victory.' I didn't know what time it was getting to be, but I didn't want him ringing that bell

again, so I just stepped out and said, 'Hands up, there!' He didn't jump or yell, as I thought he might. He just turned around as quietly as possible and asked, 'Who are you? The owner of this garage?'

" 'Yes,' I told him. 'And who might you be?'

" 'Oh, nobody in particular,' " he replied very casually.

" 'What are you doing in here?' "

" 'I'm preparing to celebrate a victory,' " he told me. " 'I peal the bell of triumph every night at ten minutes past one.' "

" 'Wel, this is one night you won't peal it. What are you celebrating with your bell?' "

" 'I've done unto my enemy even as he did unto me,' he half sang, half chanted. 'I've waited long, long years to mete out justice, but my time

came at last, and now the doctor knows what it means to a man to lay his wife cold in her grave, her head crushed in by the hand of a murderer.' ”

“N. P., did you ever hear of anything so extraordinary? Why, he must be a raving maniac!”

“That’s just what he is,” N. P. informed me quietly. “I felt sure of it as I listened to his weird intoning and watched the pupils of his eyes dilate. I resolved to be cautious. I jumped from behind and grabbed him by the scruff of his neck, but he didn’t offer any resistance. Poor skinny little beggar, it wouldn’t have done him much good if he had. Just about that time I heard you calling outside, so I marched him into the house—and you know the rest.”

“Oh, but I don’t! That’s only the beginning!

Go on and tell me what happened after you took him to the police station."

N. P. drew a long sigh and looked regretfully at the morning paper.

"You going to keep me talking all the rest of the day? Haven't you any mercy on a fellow, Courtney?"

"Not a bit. You're just getting to the interesting point. Go on and tell me what happened down at the court house. What did the Prosecuting Attorney say?"

N. P. chuckled. "Well, I suppose you would enjoy hearing that part of it. I understand that there's no love lost between you and Mr. Lippman. Before I notified the state's attorney I went first to Mr. Brewer—got him out of bed, in fact, to do it. And he and I mapped out a nice little

surprise for our legal friend. You'd never suspect it, but Brewer conceals a dramatic instinct that glories in such a situation as he planned.

"We told no one of the identity of our captive; just informed the police captain that we had a dangerous lunatic we wanted safely cared for until morning. Fortunately you were so excited when you telephoned last night that they got the impression at the station I had been murdered, and you were holding the murderer. Then we let Lippman get out his nice long rope in court this morning to carry out his own execution, which he did to the queen's taste. This was the day he was to charge the jury, you know, and he did it with a vengeance. I give you my word by the time he had drawn the picture of Cuyler as he saw him and as he expected the jury to see him, I

didn't recognize old Vincent. He wound up his impassioned speech with the demand—

“Gentlemen of the jury, if this man before you now, hanging his head in guilty shame, did not murder his wife, who did? I ask you that, gentlemen, who did?”

“Mr. Brewer hoisted himself from his chair and said smoothly:

“If you really would like to know so badly, Mr. Lippman, this person here at my left did.”

“George! It was great, Courtney! The judge, the jury, Mr. Lippman, Dr. Cuyler and every person in the court room whirled around as though they had been shot, and stared at the poor little wretch standing by Brewer, handcuffed and with a big policeman at his back.”

“Oh, dear, I wish I'd been there to see it. Why

didn't you send me word what was happening?" I reproached my husband. N. P. looked at me and hesitated.

"I did think about it, but I concluded maybe the excitement would be too much for you. Besides, after all the notoriety of the affair, I thought perhaps you'd just as soon offer your congratulations to Cuyler in a less public place," he finished so firmly that I knew it was useless to argue with him. I was sorry, of course, for I would have dearly loved to be in at the finish, but as that was the only reference N. P. ever made to the scandalous rumors about the doctor and myself, I felt I owed him acquiescence.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE MOTIVE

Dr. Cuyler released from jail and the guilty man confined in his stead, there remained only the motive for the murder to be explained. N. P. and I went together to welcome the doctor home, and in order to mitigate as much as we could the sadness of this homecoming, we carried them all back to dinner with us.

Afterwards we sat out on the verandah a long time, a curiously relaxed and tranquil group, like weary mariners who have made port after a stormy voyage. The ache of longing for Eloise was with us all, but only time could lessen that.

It was not until Mariechen had nodded off to sleep, her yellow head against her father's breast, that we approached the mystery. I had been thinking of the quiet little man who had instructed me about the iris bulbs. It didn't seem possible that he could have perpetrated such a bloody deed. Suddenly almost without my volition, a question slipped past my lips.

"Dr. Cuyler, do you suppose there is any probability that man will ever regain his senses enough to realize what he has done?"

"It is hard to say, Mrs. Temple. I had supposed he was quite sane for some time. He was dismissed from the asylum a number of years ago." Dr. Cuyler spoke with some constraint and so sadly that I regretted my question. I was about to change the subject when N. P. shook himself

out of the funny silence of his pipe and remarked:

“Curious thing how the fellow managed to deceive everyone about himself so long, eh, Cuyler?”

“I presume he was only insane on the one subject. That very often happens. A man may be rational enough ordinarily, and yet be demented along a certain line. In his case it was the idea of revenge he brooded over all these years.”

No one made any reply to this. We all realized on what delicate ground we trod. It remained for Dr. Cuyler himself to guide us through the labyrinth of the past.

“A few weeks ago nothing could have persuaded me that I would ever discuss this matter with anyone,” he said after a little minute. “Not even with my family or such friends as you dear

Temples have been. I never spoke of it to Eloise; not only because I wanted to spare her the painful knowledge, but because it was so unspeakably bitter to me."

At his tone all my curiosity ebbed away.

"Don't try to talk about it now," I begged. "As long as you're free, what does it matter?"

"I'd rather tell you," he insisted. "It is much better for you and N. P. and for Mother Wilding too to know. I feel now that perhaps I've made a mistake to try to hide it all these years. At any rate, there shall be no further mystery. We've had enough of them already."

"Dear Vincent," Mrs. Wilding stirred uneasily in her chair. "There are some mysteries that can never be explained."

I knew she was thinking of the midnight bell

whose ringing she attributed to the supernatural. I wondered if she would be any happier for the logical explanation. Whether she would or not, there was no time to tell her now, for the doctor had already commenced.

"I have to go back to the outset of my professional career to tell you of my first acquaintance with this man whom N. P. found in the garage last night. I knew him well at one time, then he went out of my life, and for years I have not seen him—nor thought of him any oftener than I could help." Dr. Cuyler spoke with visible effort, but he had steeled himself to the painful story, and he went on.

"I first began to practice medicine in a small town in Pennsylvania, where for awhile I had only the usual rounds of births, deaths, mumps

and chicken pox. It was good experience for a young fellow, but I was more interested in surgery, intending to specialize in that later, and I waited with considerable impatience for what I considered a real opportunity to show my mettle."

"But you never do any surgery now," I exclaimed.

"I'm coming to that presently," Dr. Cuyler replied, and again I wished that I had not spoken so hastily.

"This opportunity came at last in a strange, ill-fated way. My next-door neighbor was a man named Post—Andrew Post—who conducted a small nursery on the outskirts of the town. He was a kindly, likable fellow, with a great love for his work and a tremendous fund of information about all growing things. He had married rather

above himself, I gathered, and as so often happens in such cases, he fairly worshiped his wife.

“She was rather a handsome woman, as I remember—I didn’t know her as well as I did him—and though she had more education than he, they appeared to be very congenial. I often used to watch them working together about their place and think what a happy couple they were. A young bachelor, you know, is apt to be interested in the newly married.

“One morning Post appeared at my office in a state of great agitation. His wife had not been well for several weeks. She was suffering terribly with her head that morning. Would I come over at once and attend her?

“I examined her carefully and found that she had a tumor at the base of the brain which required immediate attention.

“Here was the very opportunity for which I had waited. I took Post aside and explained the situation. I told him the operation was not necessarily dangerous, and I knew that I was fully competent to perform it, but if he preferred to call someone from the city to go ahead and do so. He was aghast at my information—went all to pieces for a bit, in fact, but clung to me and showed no desire to call in anyone else. However, he opposed the operation with all the fear and distrust that is peculiar to his class. I had a great time overcoming his prejudice, he was so sure that the operation meant death to his wife. I had to explain to him over and over that she would certainly die if we didn’t operate. Finally I convinced him.

“There was no hospital in town, so, to save

Post a lot of extra expense, I offered to perform the operation in their home. I sent for a nurse, and had Mrs. Post's bedroom carefully prepared under my supervision. You see, this being my first operation and one of considerable magnitude, I intended to leave no stone unturned to make it a success. And yet—and yet—well, it's useless to speculate now. I will just tell you the facts.

“Post insisted upon being present when I operated, and though my better judgment told me to refuse him, he was so insistent that in the end I let him stay. That was my first mistake. My second was in bearing the responsibility alone.

“Mrs. Post took the anaesthetic nicely, and I began my work. I found conditions even worse than I had anticipated. I won't go into a scientific explanation; indeed, it would be impossible

to explain how the thing happened. There were great quantities of blood, and though the nurse sponged it away as rapidly as possible, it interfered greatly with my vision. Enough to tell you that I made a wrong cut and severed the nerves of respiration. I knew instantly what I had done, but there was no help. She died in a moment while I stood looking at her, my blood-stained instrument in my hand. Post did not fail to perceive the change in her breathing, and turned on me like a madman.

“‘You’ve killed her!’ he shouted, his face livid and his eyes ablaze. ‘You black-hearted butcher, you’ve killed my wife!’”

“‘Vincent!’ A shocked, frightened wail came from Mrs. Wilding.

“‘Oh, you poor boy!’ I heard myself exclaim-

ing. N. P. got out of his chair and marched over to lay a hand on Dr. Cuyler's shoulder.

"By George, old fellow!" he said in a voice of deepest sympathy.

Dr. Cuyler looked from one to the other of us with a tragic face.

"I couldn't deny it, you know," he said quietly. "I felt myself to be as surely that woman's murderer as though I had wilfully struck her down. The rest is a hideous nightmare. I offered to do anything I could, assume all expense, but Post would have none of me. From the moment his wife expired he turned against me with the most intense hatred. I was obliged to leave him finally in the hands of his friends.

"I went back to my office in an agony of self reproach. Of course, the little town buzzed with

the affair, but no movement was taken to bring action against me. I doubt, anyway, if there could have been. I kept to the house the next few days, dismissing the few patients who rallied loyally about me.

“The day of the funeral I stood at my window and watched the white casket as it was borne to the hearse. Post walked just behind it, a stricken man. As he reached the sidewalk he turned, in the face of all the people, and shook both clenched fists at my door. It was a startling demonstration which, as I recall it now, was but the germ of his long-meditated revenge.

“That night I was awakened by a knocking at my door, and when I went to open it I found Andrew Post in his night clothes, a raving, gibbering maniac. I managed to overpower him and

keep him in my office until I had summoned help. The next day he was taken to the insane asylum, where he remained several years. I sold out my office and left town immediately after this. But I kept in touch with the authorities of the asylum, feeling that I was responsible for his condition and wishing to make what feeble reparation I could by assuming his obligations. Later I went to Europe. He was discharged while I was traveling abroad, and though I tried to find him as soon as I returned, I was not able to learn anything concerning him. I supposed that he was cured and no longer in need of financial aid. So I closed the chapter on that fearful experience, fondly believing that I need never open it again.

“Time, and experience gained in European hospitals, opened a wider outlook to me. I had gone

abroad intending to study music, art, china painting—anything but my profession. But I could not keep away from it. In spite of that first dreadful experience, I could not withstand its irresistible attraction. Finally I made up my mind to return to America and begin over, but I promised myself that I would never undertake surgical work again, and I never have. It was the penalty that I intended to pay for my mistake. I thought it was sufficiently heavy, but Post, you see, thought not. Circumstances brought me here, where I opened an office and where the happiest years of my life have been spent. I need not tell you that this shadow of my youth has remained ever with me. A man doesn't outlive a thing like that, but happiness, success, the will to forget did push it into the background of my

consciousness. I had not thought of the Posts in some weeks before Eloise's death. After that I could think of nothing but her."

The Doctor drew a long breath, and I knew the weight of confession was lifted from him.

"Even when those anonymous letters appeared with their lurid allusions to my past, it never occurred to me to connect them with Post. He told me today that he had been on my trail for years, that he had come here to live with the sole purpose of revenge, but as I never happened to run across him I couldn't know that. You remember, Mrs. Temple, the afternoon of our drive, the day I was arrested, that I picked up a piece of paper with a name on it?"

I nodded. "Ruenna, wasn't it?"

"That was her name, Mrs. Post's, I mean. It's

very unusual. I have never heard it in connection with anyone but her. And it naturally revived painful memories. If my arrest hadn't followed immediately on that ride and knocked all other thoughts out of my head, I think that scrap of paper might have set me wondering. That was the last I knew of Post until the other day in court, when Lippman produced that photograph of Mrs. Post. So when N. P. turned up this morning with Post, whom I hadn't seen in twelve years, in his clutches, it was as great a surprise to me as to anyone. I realize that I have been singularly lacking in perception about it all, but my brain seems to have been benumbed lately."

"Did you have any talk with this Post?" I asked hurriedly, to cover the doctor's painful pause.

"A little, yes. He admitted the crime freely. Seemed to have no compunction about it. Revenge had got to be an *idée fixe* with him. Through his work at the florist's he found an opportunity to call upon Eloise and familiarize himself with the place. The rest was a matter of chance and cunning. His hour came and he improved it. It was my wife for his."

Dr. Cuyler's stern composure trembled. The anguish of his thought shook us all. After a moment he mastered himself and went on evenly.

"The man is insane, of course. That accounts for all the extraordinary things that have been disturbing you, Mrs. Temple. The letters, the commotion in the garage—and all. He seems not to have been able to keep away from the place."

"It accounts for everything," I said excitedly. "I might have suspected long ago if I'd had any wits at all. No one but a person utterly insane would have thought of doing all the impossible things that have happened here in the last four weeks."

"Yes, I think it explains everything," the doctor agreed wearily. "Post builded better than he knew. His idea of revenge at first carried him no further than exact retribution. Later, when suspicion began to point to me, he conceived the idea that it lay in his power to further that suspicion, and he did so, delightedly. He frankly acknowledged this to me. Between his machinations and one or two old coincidences, like Rossbaum's disappearance—he returned this morning, by the way—the police were able to make quite a showing against me.

"I've taken the matter up with Lippman, and the case is to be dismissed, as, of course, Post cannot be prosecuted. He is to be sent to the state asylum tomorrow. I need not ask my two best friends to keep the reason for his enmity inviolate. As far as I myself am concerned, I feel now that it doesn't matter; but for Mariechen's sake I would like to put it all away from me."

He looked at the sleeping child with a grave, tender expression, then rose and brought her over to me.

"We must be going home," he said. "Will you hold her a moment while I help mother?"

Mariechen roused a little at the transfer, but settled herself comfortably for another nap.

"Want to stay wiv Auntie Court," she whimpered, snuggling closer in my arms as her father

came to take her. If I had prompted the speech myself, nothing could have better exemplified my relations to the Cuyler family. Dr. Cuyler smiled at N. P. as he took the child from me.

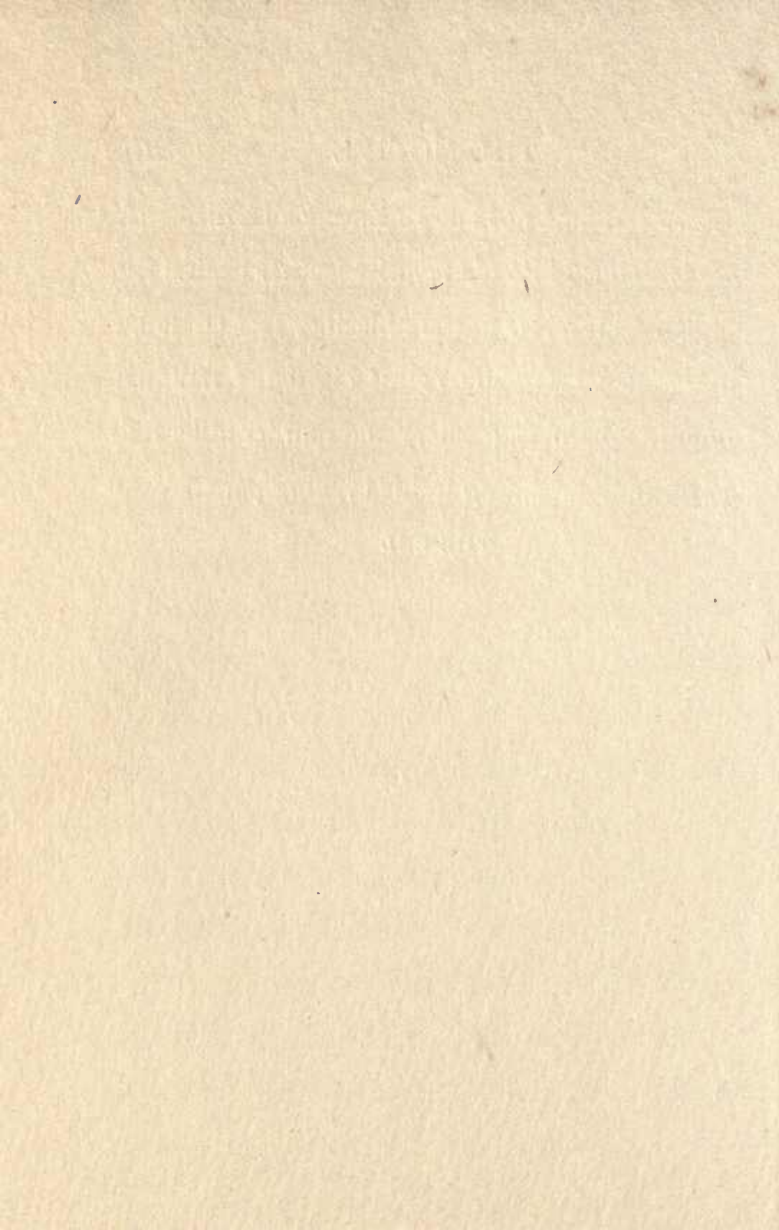
"You'll have to adopt us all, I think," he said. "We don't seem able to get along without Mrs. Temple."

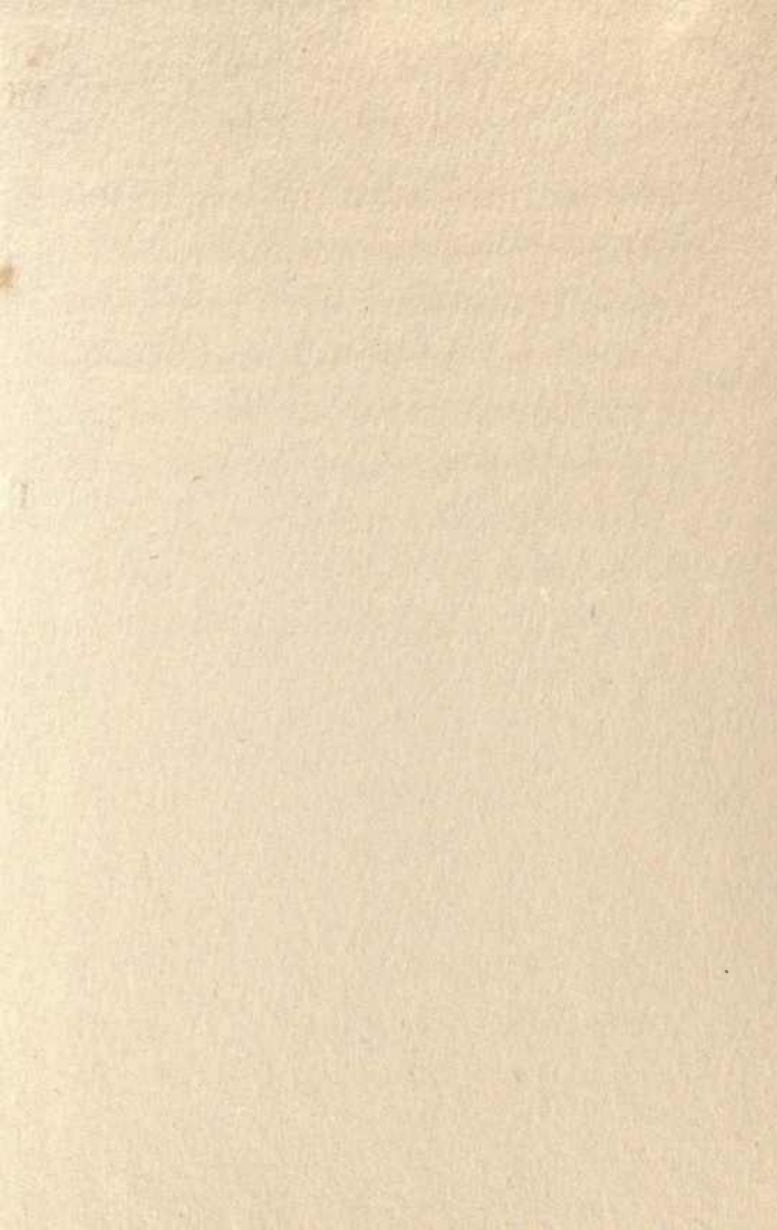
I watched them cross the lawn, Mariechen's sleepy head nodding over his shoulder, Mrs. Wilding clinging to his arm. With those two helpless legacies from Eloise dependent upon his affection and care, I felt with thankfulness that he would still find life worth living. And it was due to N. P.'s blundering cleverness that this was possible.

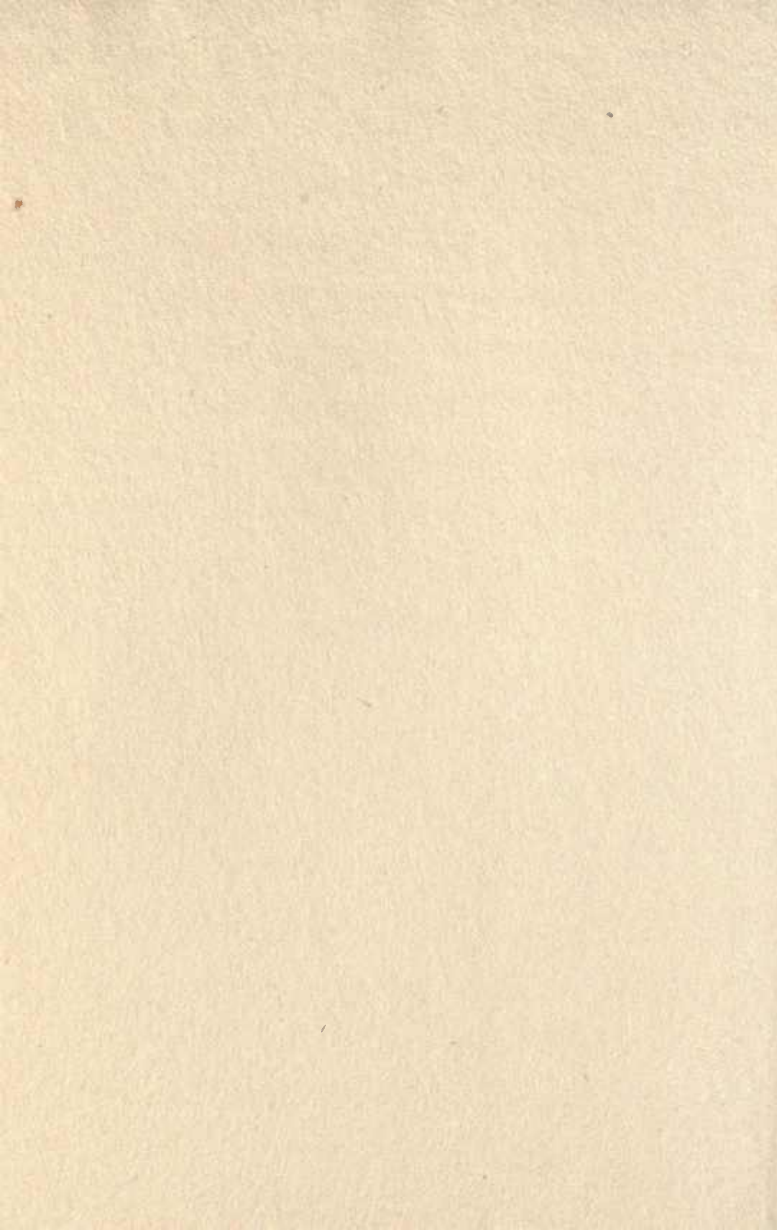
I turned with a rush of feeling to tell him so, but N. P. was not there. I glanced in at the window and began to laugh—with a whole-hearted

enjoyment I had not known since Eloise died. N. P. was stodged into his favorite leather chair. All the lights in the room were blazing. Peace shone on his face; every line of his big figure radiated content. Madness, mystery and murder alike forgotten, N. P. was deep in his evening paper.

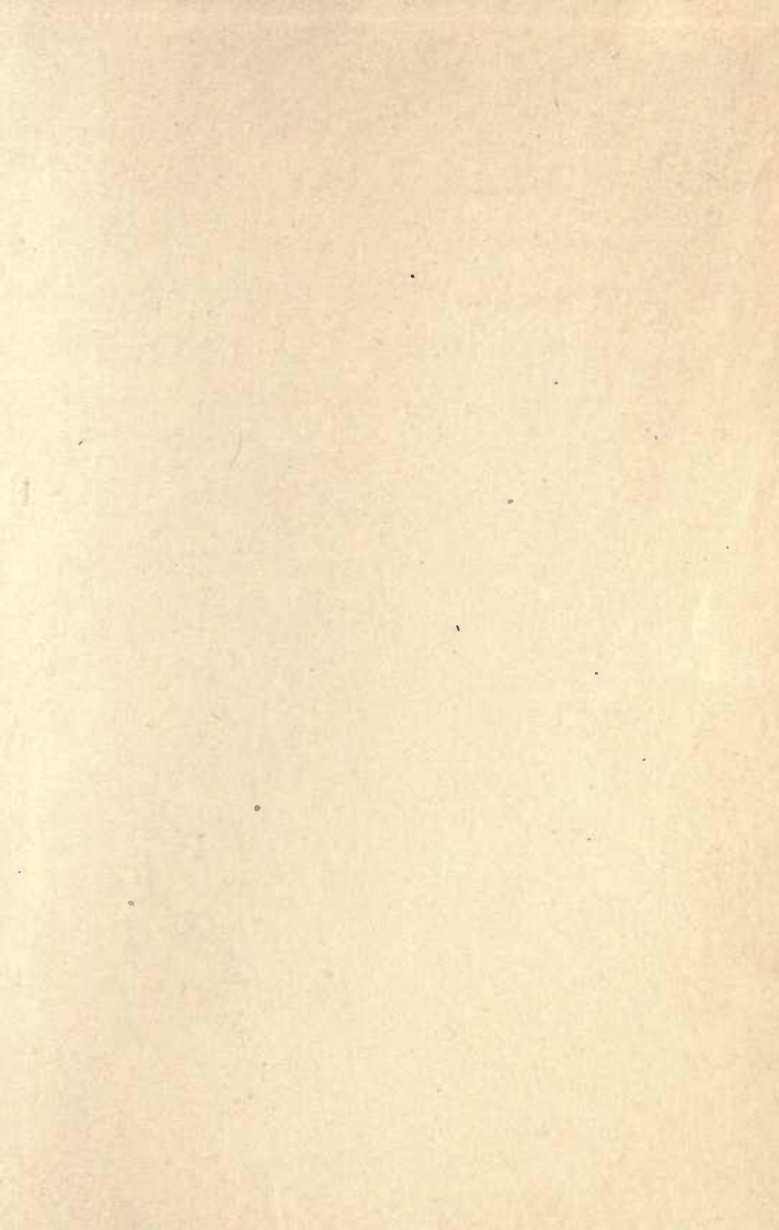
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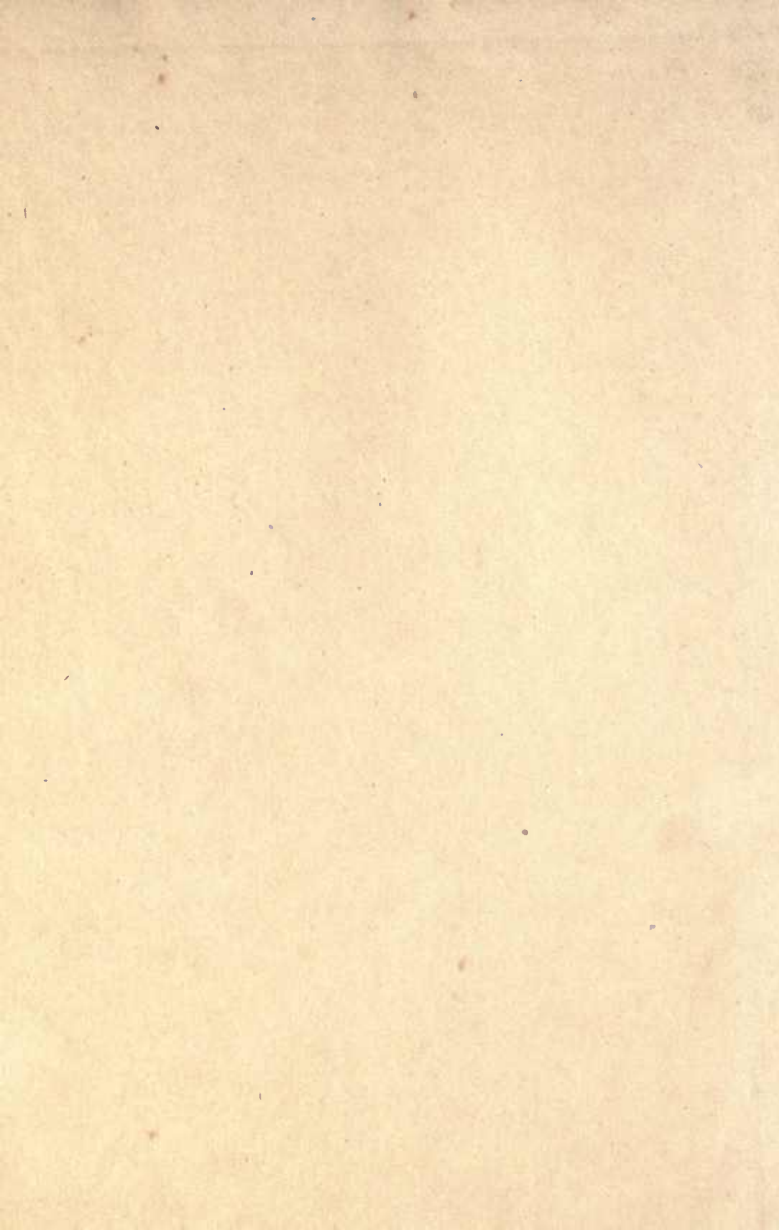












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